

2000
YEARS OF
MAYAN
LITERATURE



DENNIS TEDLOCK

WITH NEW TRANSLATIONS AND
INTERPRETATIONS BY THE AUTHOR



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
BERKELEY LOS ANGELES LONDON

The publisher gratefully acknowledges the generous support of
the Ahmanson Foundation Humanities Endowment Fund
of the University of California Press Foundation.

The publisher also gratefully acknowledges the generous support of
the Director's Circle of the University of California Press Foundation,
whose members are:

ANONYMOUS	CONSTANCE LEWALLEN
DIANA & EHRHARD BAHR	DAVID & SHEILA LITTLEJOHN
MARILYN BANCEL	DIANNE SACHKO MACLEOD
NANCY & ROGER BOAS	DORIS CUNEO MASLACH
ROBERT BOROFKY	MICHAEL McCONE
DANIEL BOYARIN	THOMAS & BARBARA METCALF
GENE A. BRUCKER	JACK & JACQUELINE MILES
EARL & JUNE CHEIT	FRAN & PAT MITCHELL
JOE & WANDA CORN	BARBARA Z. OTTO
LLOYD COTSEN	DALE PETERSON
JOHN & JO DE LUCA	SHELDON POLLOCK
FRANCES DINKELSPIEL & GARY WAYNE	LUCINDA REINOLD
ROSS E. DUNN	STEPHEN P. RICE
PHYLLIS GEBAUER	ROBERT C. RITCHIE
JENNIFER A. GONZÁLEZ	RÉMY & NICOLE SAISSSELIN
STEPHEN & GAIL HUMPHREYS	JENNIFER BASYE SANDER
MARK JUERGENSMEYER	SCHAFER FAMILY FUND
BETH & FRED KARREN	CAROLYN SEE
LAWRENCE KRAMER	RUTH A. SOLIE
WATSON M. & SITA LAETSCH	ROY WAGNER
MARILYN LEE & HARVEY SCHNEIDER	JOHN & PRISCILLA WALTON

2000

MAYAN

2000
YEARS OF
MAYAN
LITERATURE

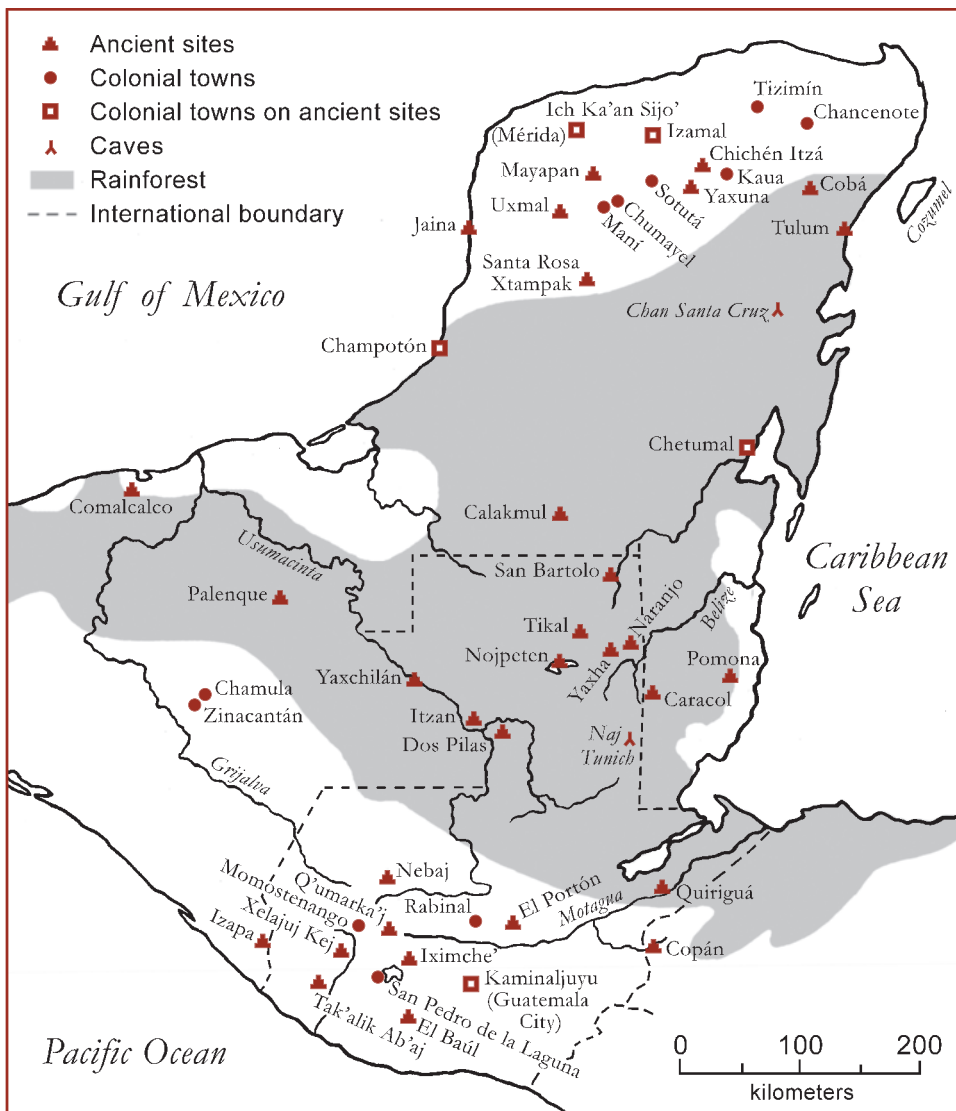


DENNIS TEDLOCK

WITH NEW TRANSLATIONS AND
INTERPRETATIONS BY THE AUTHOR



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
BERKELEY LOS ANGELES LONDON



The Mayan Region

CONTENTS

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19

20

21

22

23

24

25

26

27

28

29

30

31

32

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

.....

NOTE ON THE PRONUNCIATION OF MAYAN WORDS

.....

This page intentionally left blank

INTRODUCTION

.....



As a first step toward understanding works written in the Mayan script, this book offers what I hope is a friendly introduction to the script itself (chapter 1). Next (in chapter 2) comes a brief look at the oldest known examples of Mayan inscriptions, which date from as early as 400 B.C.E. Many of these works are fragmentary and all of them are difficult to read, but they offer a foretaste of things to come. Most of them come from the Guatemalan highlands and Pacific piedmont, to the south of the rainforest region where the inscriptions of the Classic period of Mayan culture (250–925 C.E.) were centered.

An introduction to Classic texts is provided by ceramic drinking vessels that were painted by Ajmaxam, a writer and artist who worked in the city whose ruins are known as Naranjo (chapter 3). The most famous work of this artist, the Vase of the Seven Gods, is like many other works of the Classic period in bringing together two events, one of which took place in the remote era when the gods were the only inhabitants of the world and the other of which took place during the era of human life. The vessel was created as a gift for a royal child who would use it to drink chocolate, made from the first fruits of a cacao grove planted at the time of his birth.

Classic texts carved in stone are the subject of the next five chapters, beginning with the monuments of Copán and Quiriguá, at the southeast corner of the Mayan world (chapter 4). A stela at Quiriguá, dedicated by the lord Fiery Splendor in the Sky, has a mythic narrative inscribed on one side and a historical one on the other. Next comes a visit to Palenque, at the opposite corner of the Mayan world, where long texts are inscribed on stone tablets in a group of three temples commissioned by the lord Sun-Eyed Snake Jaguar (chapters 5–7). The story of his dynasty is interwoven with that of the goddess Cormorant and her triplet sons, whose spirit familiars become visible in the night sky as the planets Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn.

When Sun-Eyed Snake Jaguar dedicated his temples, he summoned the ghost of his paternal grandmother. A similar event is the subject of an illustrated text at Yaxchilán, to the east of Palenque (chapter 8). It is carved on the lintel of the main door of a palace constructed for Lady Shark Fin, the principal wife of a lord who ruled that town for sixty years, and it shows her summoning the patron deity of her husband's



PART ONE

This page intentionally left blank

1 Learning to Read

STANDING AT THE CORE of the Mayan writing system are the signs for dates from a divinatory calendar that was shared with the rest of Mesoamerica. Each date combines a day number, taken from a repeating series that runs from one through thirteen, with a day name, taken from a series of twenty names that run concurrently with the numbers. Because thirteen and twenty have no common factor, there are 260 possible combinations of number and name.

As a mathematical device and a measure of time, the divinatory calendar has more to do with the human body than with astronomy. A full moon is thirteen days old, as measured from the first appearance of a crescent on the western horizon at dusk, but thirteen is also the number of major points of articulation in the human body: ankles, knees, hips, wrists, elbows, and shoulders, all of which come in pairs, and the neck. The number of toes and fingers is twenty, and $13 \times 20 = 260$ days—which, by Mayan reckoning, is the ideal interval between the diagnosis of a pregnancy and the birth of a child.

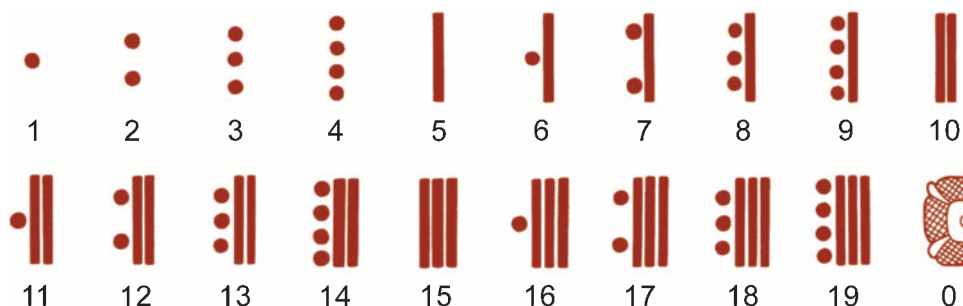
The known history of the Mesoamerican divinatory calendar begins around 700–500 B.C.E., when it made its first appearance at a Zapotec site in the Mexican state of Oaxaca. The Mayan communities of highland Guatemala have never stopped using it, and their version has recently become available in printed appointment books. Ancient texts in the Mayan script nearly always include divinatory dates, and the signs for writing them remained unchanged over a very long period. A Mayan who could read a divinatory date written in 1511, the year in which Spaniards first came ashore in Yucatán, would have had no difficulty reading dates written twelve centuries earlier.

Judging from the evidence of graffiti, Mayans who were marginally literate were able to write divinatory dates, even if they were unable to write anything about the events connected to those dates. During the Classic period, graffiti were commonly incised on the plastered interiors of rooms. Most of these inscriptions are pictorial, but signs from the writing system appear here and there, sometimes rendered in such a sketchy fashion that they look like attempts to imitate writing. The legible inscriptions usually take the form of divinatory dates, often appearing in isolation rather than forming part of a larger text. Here is a date from a wall in the ruins of Tikal, next to a formal version of the same number and name. On the left side of both versions is the number 8, rendered with three dots (each with a value of one) and a bar (with a value of five). The day name is Ajaw, meaning “Lord.” The person who scratched it on the wall left out the oval frame and trefoil device of the formal



version, but this omission does not change the way the date would be read aloud. Instead, the frame and trefoil have a purely semantic function, reminding the reader that the reference is to the day named Ajaw rather than to a person who bears the title *ajaw*.

Numbers in Mayan texts nearly always concern the measurement of time, and like the number 8 in the date above, they are usually written using a bar-and-dot notation system rather than by using signs that correspond to the words of a specific language. I have chosen to translate bar-and-dot numerals with their arabic equivalents, which can also be read in more than one language. The numerals constructed with bars and dots range from 1 to 19, and they are used in combination with signs for zero such as the one included here:



When numbers modify nouns, they are usually prefixed in a vertical position, like the ones shown above, but they can be written horizontally, in which case the dots go above the bars. In the dates inscribed on monuments, a sign in the form of the profiled head of the number's patron deity may take the place of bar-and-dot notation. Here, for example, are the patrons of the numbers eight, nine, and ten. The patron of the number eight is Nal, who is named for an ear of corn. The name of the patron of nine, Yax B'alam or "First Jaguar," includes a play on the sound of the word for the number, which takes the form *b'olon*



in the principal languages of the inscriptions. The patron of ten is Kimi, or "Death," perhaps because *lajun*, the word for the number, suggests *laj*, which means "the end." We do not know whether a person reciting from an inscription with such signs would have named the deities or the corresponding numbers, or both.

Numbers higher than 19 are written using place numeration. Bar-and-dot numbers and zeros (if needed) are arranged in a vertical column, with the values assigned to the places increasing upward. In general, the successive values increase by a multiple of 20 (as contrasted with 10 in a decimal system), but the value assigned to the third place is 360 (an approximation of the solar year) rather than 400. In the fourth and fifth places, the progression returns to multiples of 20, with $20 \times 360 = 7,200$ in the fourth place and $20 \times 7,200 = 144,000$ in the fifth. Numbers with as many as five places are usually dates from a calendar known as the long count, which measures the number of days that have elapsed since a hypothetical zero point equivalent to August 11, 3114 B.C.E. in retrospective Gregorian reckoning. In the long-count date at the top of the next page,

taken from an almanac in a book, the lowest of the five places is occupied by a sign for zero that represents an empty shell. Expressed in decimal terms, the value of the highest place in this number is 1,296,000, followed by 64,800 in the fourth place, 3,240 in the third, 320 in the second, and zero in the first and lowest place. The grand total is 1,364,360 days, and the equivalent Gregorian date is February 7, 623 C.E.

	9 x 144,000
	9 x 7,200
	9 x 360
	16 x 20
	0 x 1

In dates from the 260-day calendar, the day names that follow the numbers are written by drawing upon a set of twenty signs that are logographic, which is to say that each of them stands for an entire word. The signs are different from the ones used in other Mesoamerican writing systems, and in that sense they call upon the reader to interpret them as words in a language of the Mayan family. Even so, the signs transcend linguistic differences to the extent that they allow speakers of different Mayan dialects and languages to pronounce some of the names differently, or to use different names in some cases. What holds the set of twenty signs together from one Mayan language to another is their organization in a fixed sequence, which would have made it easy to treat differences in the spoken names as oral variations within a system whose visible expression was uniform. For Mayans learning to write, these signs would have been the closest thing to an alphabet, in that they have a fixed number and a fixed sequence.

In the account of the twenty day names that follows, two versions of each sign are illustrated. The first one shows the sign as it might appear in a text written with a brush or pen, whereas the second shows the same sign as it might appear when carved. In *italics* after each pair of signs is a translation based on one or more of the Mayan names that we know were assigned to the corresponding day. I give preference to names that could have been used by writers and readers of the Classic period, most of whom used a language belonging to the Ch'olan branch of the Mayan language family. This branch happens to be the one with the least linguistic documentation, so some of the name choices are based on indirect evidence from other Mayan languages.

In the reckoning of long-count dates, periods lasting 360, 7,200, and 144,000 days always begin on a divinatory day with the name that comes first in the following list (but with a variable day number), and they reach completion on a day with the name that comes last.



Ceiba. Imix, the name for this day in Yukatekan languages, is an esoteric term for the ceiba or silk-cotton tree, which is the model for the Mayan version of the world tree. In the K'ichean languages of the central Guatemalan highlands, the day name is Imox, meaning “left-handed.”



Wind. In all Mayan languages, the name for this day is Ik' or a cognate thereof. The meaning, which extends to “breath,” is the same in all cases as well.



Night. In most Mayan languages, the name of this day is Ak'b'al or a cognate thereof, with meanings that extend to “darkness” or “nightfall.” In the languages of Chiapas and western Guatemala, this day was named instead for a god of the slit drum known as Watan or Woton.



Net. In nearly every Mayan language, the name of this day is K'an or a cognate thereof, with meanings that include “yellow corn,” and the sign itself may represent a corn kernel. The meanings of the Yucatekan and K'ichean names, respectively K'an and K'at, include a net bag for carrying ears of corn.



Snake. Embedded in the Yucatekan name for this day, Chikchan, is the Ch'olan term for “snake,” which is *chan*. The term for “snake” is *kaan* in Yucatekan and *kan* in K'ichean, and the K'ichean name of the day is Kan. The sign (at least in the carved version) represents the profiled head of a rattlesnake.



Death. The name is Kimi in Yucatekan and Kame in K'ichean, meaning “death.” Similar names prevail in other Mayan languages, but in Chiapas and western Guatemala, this day takes its name from Tox, a lord of the underworld.



Deer. In most Mayan languages, the name of this day means “deer,” but the meaning of the Yucatekan name, Manik', is unknown. The sign is an image of the right hand with the thumb and forefinger drawn together. It can be used as a sign for a syllable, in which case it has the value *chi*, the first syllable in *chij*, the Ch'olan term for “deer.” In both Yucatekan and K'ichean, the term for “deer” is *kej*, and the K'ichean name for the day is Kej.



Sunk. The Yucatekan name is Lamat, and the verb stem *lam* refers to the sinking of objects in water or below the horizon. In K'ichean, the name is Q'anil, meaning “yellow” or “ripe.” In other contexts, this sign stands for words meaning “star” or “planet.”



Tribute. The Yucatekan name is Muluk, and *mulb'il* means “tribute” in the sense of tribute payments. The K'ichean name is Toj, and the verb stem *toj* means “to pay.” In the K'iche' kingdom, tribute payments were due on days named Toj.



Dog. The image in the carved sign is that of a dog, and the K'ichean name for this day is Tz'i', meaning “dog.” The word for “dog” is *tz'i'* in most Mayan languages, including Ch'olan but excluding Yucatekan. Ok, meaning “foot,” is the Yucatekan name for the day.



Monkey. In nearly every Mayan language, the name for this day is B'atz', which is the term for the howler monkey. The Yucatekan name is Chuwen, a term for "artisan." Throughout the Mayan region, the patron deities of artisans, including writers, were divine monkeys who were twin brothers.



Tooth. The image in this sign is that of a skull and jawbone with at least one tooth showing, and early versions depict a toothed jawbone without the skull. Nearly all Mayan names for this day refer to the mouth or teeth, as in the case of Elab' in Tzotzil and Chuj, or they simply mean "tooth," as in the case of K'ichean E'. The Yucatekan name is Eb', meaning "stairway."



Lack. The Yucatekan name is B'en, and *b'enel* describes a state of incompleteness. The sign can also be used for a syllable, in which case it has the value *aj*. In K'ichean languages, the name for this day is Aj, meaning "cane stalk."



Jaguar. In all Mayan languages, the name for this day is Ix or Hix, meaning "jaguar." The image is that of a jaguar's face, with jaguar spots serving to mark the eyes and mouth.



Bird. In all Mayan languages other than Yucatekan, the name for this day is Tz'ikin, meaning "bird." The image may be the profiled head of the avian avatar of the god Itzamnaaj, whose name means something like "Far Seer" or "True Magician." The Yucatekan name for the day is Men, and *ajmen* means "worker" or "shaman."



Honey. Among the Mayan languages of Chiapas and western Guatemala, the name for this day is Chab'in, which probably derives from Ch'olan *chab'*, meaning "bee," "beehive," or "honey." The Yucatekan name is Kib', meaning "wax," probably referring to beeswax. In K'ichean languages, the name is Ajmak or Ajmaq, meaning "sinner."



Earth. The Yucatekan name is Kab'an, meaning "earth," but the K'ichean name is No'j, meaning "thought."



Blade. The image is that of the flaked surface of a flint projectile point or knife blade. The Yucatekan name for this day is Etz'nab', which combines *etz'*, meaning "sharpened," with *nab'*, referring to the blade of a weapon. The K'ichean name is Tijax, an esoteric term for a flint knife.



Thunder. The names include Chak in Ch'ol, Chawak in Chontal, and Chawuk in Tzotzil, all of which mean "thunder" or "thunderstorm." Yucatekan Kawak and K'ichean Kawuq appear to be

cognate with the Chontal and Tzotzil names, with a predictable consonant change from *ch* to *k*, but their apparent meanings are different. *Kawal* means “pride” in Yukatekan, and *kawuj* means “to dress up” in K’ichean.



Lord. The name is Ajaw in Yukatekan, Ajwal in Ch’olan, and Ajpu or Junajpu in K’ichean. Among the Mayan gods are twin brothers who hunt with blowguns, one of whom is named for this day. In Yukatekan and Ch’olan, he is Jun Ajaw or Jun Ajwal, meaning “One Lord,” whereas in K’ichean, he is known by the name Junajpu, which combines *jun* or “one” with *ajpu*, the term for “blowgunner.”

In addition to the twenty day signs, there are other logographs that number in the hundreds. Some of them, like the day signs, could have been organized into sets. For example, there are signs for the five colors that are associated with the five directions, and they could have been learned in the same order that was followed in a ritual circuit of the directions. Here are the five color signs in their directional order, corresponding (from left to right) to white (north), black (west), yellow (south), red (east), and a range that includes green and blue (center):



These signs are logographs in that they stand for complete words, but instead of standing alone, they are usually prefixed to larger characters that name the objects whose colors are being described.

The logographs for color terms seem arbitrary, though teachers of the writing system may have imparted explanations for their forms. Many logographs offer direct visual clues to their meaning, including some of the day signs. Here are further examples:



The sign for *chok*, meaning “to scatter” or “to sprinkle,” takes the form of a partly opened right hand with objects falling from it. The sign for *k'in*, meaning “sun” or “day,” represents the sun as a flower, with petals that suggest rays while at the same time forming a diagram of the four points at which the sun rises and sets at the solstices. The sign for *way*, referring to a dream or to a person’s spirit companion, is a simplified frontal view of a human face with the left side peeled away to reveal the spotted hide of a jaguar, the most powerful of spirit companions. In the sign for *ch'een*, mean-

ing “cave,” a disembodied eye, in side view, hovers on the boundary between the inside and outside of a cave, with darkness behind the eye and light in front of it.

In addition to logographic signs, there are signs that stand for individual syllables. Here are some signs for syllables that consist of a vowel alone, without an accompanying consonant:



The smaller signs for *a*, *o*, and *u* in the bottom row are attached to the outer edges of larger characters. They appear here in the orientation they would have on the top edge, but they may be rotated as needed for placement on the left, right, or bottom edge.

The remainder of the syllabic signs stand for the combination of a consonant with one of five vowels. Here, for example, are some signs in which the consonant is *l*:



The signs for *la* and *li* in the second row are attached to the edges of larger characters, and the *le* sign can be attached in this way as well.

Some logographs can serve as signs for syllables. The sound of the word is shortened to its initial consonant and vowel, as in the following examples:



The two signs for the word *nuk*, meaning “large” or “thick,” can also serve as signs for the syllable *nu*. Next come two signs for the word *te'*, “tree,” which can also serve as signs for the syllable *te*. Finally, the sign for *tzi*, meaning “raw” or “new,” can serve as a sign for *tzi*.

Logographs are often complemented with syllabic signs that help the reader by indicating the first and/or last sound of the word in question, as in these characters:



In the first example, the main sign is a logograph for *winik*, meaning “person” or “human being.” The first syllable of *winik* is given by the sign attached to the left edge of the logograph, and the final consonant is indicated by the sign underneath it, which normally stands for the syllable *ki* but is pronounced without its vowel when it comes last in the spelling of a word. In the second example, the main sign is the profiled head of a jaguar, which by itself can serve as a logograph for *b’alam*, meaning “jaguar.” Beneath the head is a sign that normally stands for the syllable *ma* but is here pronounced without its vowel, thus giving the final consonant of *b’alam*.

In the above examples, the vowel that precedes the final consonant is the same as the unpronounced vowel in the syllabic sign that confirms that consonant: *winik* is followed by a sign for *ki*, and *b’alam* is followed by a sign for *ma*. This arrangement is in accordance with a spelling rule that applies whenever the vowel that precedes the final consonant is a plain one. But if that vowel is lengthened or modified in some other way, a sign with a contrasting vowel may be chosen to indicate the final consonant:



The main sign in the first character is a logograph for Chaak, the name of a deity who brings thunderstorms, and the choice of a syllabic sign for *ki* (rather than *ka*) to represent the final consonant confirms that the preceding vowel is a long one (indicated here by a double *a*). The second character begins with a syllabic sign for *cha*, which would ordinarily have a short *a*, but the choice of *ki* to indicate the final consonant calls for lengthening. The resultant word is again Chaak.

As in the second version of Chaak, a writer may choose to spell a word for which a logograph is available with syllabic signs alone. Here is another example:



At left is the logograph for *pakal*, the term for “shield,” followed by a syllabic spelling of the same word that combines three signs (with the vowel of the last one silenced). The twenty day names are never spelled out in this way, nor are their logographs complemented with signs for their first or last syllables.

In the spelling of a word that has a repeated sound, the affected syllable may be marked with two dots rather than being written twice:



In the first example, the repetition is indicated by the two dots at the upper right of the second syllabic sign, and the resulting word (with the final vowel dropped) is *tz'unun*,

the term for “hummingbird.” In the second example, the two dots are at the lower left of the first syllabic sign, and the result is *kakam*, a term for “cacao” that has come into English by way of Spanish.

Two syllabic signs may be conflated, creating a single sign with features from each of the original signs:



In this example, *po* and *mo* are combined to produce *pom*, the term for copal incense.

When a word is modified by grammatical affixes, the syllabic sign corresponding to a prefix is placed on the top or left side of a character, and a suffix is placed on the bottom or right side. In the following examples, the noun or verb stems to which the affixes are attached are spelled with syllabic signs as well:



The first character combines *u*-, a third-person singular possessive pronoun, with *lak*, “plate,” to produce *ulak*, “his or her plate.” The second character combines *y*-, a third-person singular subject pronoun used before vowels; *ak*’, a verb stem meaning “to give”; and *-am*, a marker of ongoing action. The result is *yak’am*, “he or she gives it.”

Combinations of signs sometimes reflect poetic structure rather than linguistic structure as such. Many passages in Mayan texts take the form of parallel verse, in which words or phrases are organized in pairs or larger groups whose meanings clarify or complement one another. Most pairs require two or more characters, but if they consist of short noun phrases, they may be written with a single character. In this example, the spelling of a pair is accomplished by combining three signs, the first two of which are conflated:



K'ahk is “fire,” and the combination of *b'u* and *tz'i* produces the lengthened *u* of *b'uitz'*, “smoke.” The meaning is similar to that of the English phrase “smoke and fire,” but no conjunction is needed when pairing complementary terms in Mayan languages. In these next examples, a pair of nouns is preceded by a modifier that is meant to apply to each of them in turn:



Extending clear across the top of the first character is the third-person singular possessive pronoun *u-*, which applies to both of the nouns below it. Thus, the full reading is *utook'*, *upakal*, “his weapon, his shield.” In the second character, the adjective *k'a* applies to both of the nouns written beneath it, so that the full reading is *k'a ha'*, *k'a wah*, “plentiful drink, plentiful food.”

Poetics and timekeeping come together in one of the commonest pairings, which sets the time of an event by combining dates from two calendars to form what Mayanists call a calendar-round date. The first member of the pair comes from the 260-day calendar, and the second comes from a calendar that tracks a 365-day year. The year is divided into eighteen named periods lasting 20 days each, followed by a final period lasting 5 days. In a date from this calendar, the number of days that have elapsed since the beginning of a period is prefixed to the name of the period. The opening day is the *chum*, or “seating,” of the period, and the remaining days are numbered from one through nineteen. Here is an example of a complete calendar-round date, written from left to right:



In the second part, the prefixed number means that 8 days have passed since the beginning of the 20-day period whose Yucatekan name is Kumk'u, meaning “Kiln.” This is the last of the 20-day periods, leaving only 5 days to complete the year. The 4 Ajaw 8 Kumk'u combination happens to coincide with the zero point of the long count. Any given combination recurs once each fifty-two years.

This next pair of phrases, again written with two characters, is from an inscription painted on a vase, composed entirely in parallel verse (see chapter 3 for a fuller account):



The first character combines *u-*, the third-person singular possessive pronoun, with *tz'ib'*, a term for “writing” and other graphic arts. The second character begins with the word *yaal*, in which *y-* is the form the same pronoun takes before a vowel and *aal* means “speech.” Thus, the poet combines the ideas of writing and speaking, both of which belong to the *way* of the remaining sign, which refers to a dream or to a person’s spirit companion. The full reading is *utz'ib'*, */yaal way*, “the writing, / the speaking of the dream (or spirit),” referring to the poet’s source of inspiration.

Parallel phrases can occur in groups of three or more, as in this passage from an inscription painted around the rim of a bowl. Together, the four characters identify the mother of the man for whom the bowl was made:



She is first of all K'in Ixik, “Sun Woman,” and the second character elaborates on this idea by calling her Ix Tz'ib' Chan, “Woman Who Inscribes (or Paints) the Sky.” The next character gives her title as Ix Ajaw B'alam, literally “Woman Lord Jaguar.” Ajt'zib'al, in the final position, halts the repetition of *ix* but picks up *tz'ib'* from the second character. *Aj-* is agentive, and *tz'ib'a-* is a verb stem meaning “to inscribe” or “to paint,” converted by the suffix *-l* into a noun for something that has been inscribed or painted, in this case the bowl on which these words are written. Putting the four characters together and remembering that the verb “to be” is usually implicit in Mayan languages, we have something like this:

Sun Woman,
 Woman Who Inscribes the Sky,
 Lady Jaguar,
 she is the one who inscribed this.

When texts consisting of multiple characters occur elsewhere than around the perimeters of ceramic vessels, they are usually divided into rows and columns by an underlying grid that creates spaces of approximately equal size. The columns are in pairs, and the two characters on each row read from left to right. When the bottom row in a pair of columns is completed, the reading continues with the top row in the next pair to the right. Figure 1 shows a passage from a lunar almanac in the Dresden Codex, with eight characters arranged in two double columns. The first character abbreviates a name whose full version is 13 Kan Kuy, “13 Sky Owl,” referring to a constellation and the deity who resides there. On the present occasion, according to the next two characters, the owl is *umuut Uh Ixik*, “the herald of Moon Woman,” which is to say the corresponding stars are rising above the horizon just ahead of the moon. What this event portends is given by the character that comes in fourth



Fig. 1. Passage from a lunar almanac in the Dresden Codex, with eight characters in two double columns. Within a pair of columns, the reading order goes from left to right and top to bottom.

place: *umuuka*, “Something (or someone) is hidden,” or, more ominously, “Someone is buried.”

Next come the characters in the second pair of columns, of which the first three describe an event of the same kind but with a different constellation and a change of wording: *K'uk' umuuk Uh Ixik*, “Quetzal brings news of Moon Woman.” The fourth and final character describes the portent: *ox okwa*, in which *ox* is literally “three” but serves as a figure of speech for “several,” and *okwa* is a term for wedding feasts. The portent (*umuuka*) in the first half of this text and the event (*umuuk*) in the second half are spelled in the same way, but the context demands that they be read differently, keeping the final vowel in the first instance and dropping it in the second.

The spelling choices in this passage give birds a visual presence in addition to their verbal presence. The writer could have spelled the word for owl (*kuy*) with syllabic signs but instead rendered it with a logograph in the form of the head of a horned owl. The sign chosen for the syllable *mu* in the spelling of *umuuka* and *umuuk* is the profiled head of a *muut*, a partridge that plays no direct role in this text but is one of the principal birds of omen, warning of unexpected events by suddenly taking flight from its hiding place.

Most texts are accompanied by pictures, and in many cases there are links between the two that call attention to the pictorial aspects of the text and the textual aspects of the picture. Figure 2 shows the almanac passage about Moon Woman and the owl again but this time includes the picture that occupies the space beneath the text. We can see an obvious resemblance between the head of the horned owl in the text and the one in the picture. Both versions show the owl's beak in profile, but its eye is turned to the front and both horns are visible. The owl in the text is *said* to be Moon Woman's herald, whereas the one in the picture is *shown* to be taking flight above her. Moon Woman, like the owl, has the same eye in both places. In her name the sign for *uh*, meaning “moon,” is a kinky strand of hair, and the ends of her longest hairs in the picture are kinky as well. The biggest difference between text and picture is that the text follows the temporal sequence of speech, whereas the picture is organized in space. Even so, the text has a spatial dimension in its placement of the name of the owl above the name of Moon Woman, and the picture has a temporal dimension that reads from top to bottom, with the owl, wings outspread, coming into view ahead of Moon Woman.



Fig. 2. The first part of the text from figure 1, complete with the picture that accompanies it. The red highlighting shows the links between text and picture.



2 Early Mayan Writing

THE STORY OF the Mayan script begins with scattered fragments, and necessarily so. Much of the evidence lies deeply buried beneath layers of the more recent past, and even when it does come to light, it is more likely to be damaged than is later evidence. Pottery vessels whose surfaces are painted or carved sometimes survive intact, but early writers did not favor pottery as a medium for their work. They did paint texts on plastered surfaces, but plaster is easily damaged. They also carved texts in stone, but stone can erode, break, and even shatter. As for writing on hide, cloth, or paper, those materials have long since disintegrated.

The ongoing story of the discovery of fragments of early Mayan writing is itself composed of disconnected fragments, of chance encounters with texts that were not necessarily what an archaeologist was looking for. And even when an early text does come to light, the attempt to read it produces only fragmentary results. Some of the signs in such texts are recognizable as ancestral versions of signs that appear in the more readable texts of later times, but many others resist interpretation. Early texts are much less likely than later ones to recombine signs, creating composite characters or affixing small signs to larger ones. What this means for a would-be reader is that there is a scarcity of syllabic signs. The fewer the clues to the sound of a text and the component parts of its words, the harder it is to determine the language in which it was written, and not knowing the language makes it difficult to experiment with possible word sequences.

The place and time where writing originated in Mesoamerica are unknown and may be unknowable. As things stand, the earliest evidence is provided by Monument 3 at the Zapotec site of San José Mogote in Oaxaca, dating from around 700–500 B.C.E. Carved on this monument are a day number and name from the 260-day divinatory calendar, which may have been in use all over Mesoamerica by that time. Within the Mayan world, the earliest evidence for writing dates from the Late Preclassic period, running from 400 B.C.E. to 250 C.E. The oldest-known texts, both of which have been dated to around 400 B.C.E., were discovered at the Guatemalan sites of El Portón, in the valley of the Río Salamá in the northern highlands, and San Bartolo, in the rainforest of the far northern lowlands. In both cases, the characters appear in single columns rather than in the paired columns that predominate later.

The inscription at El Portón (figure 3) is from the lower end of what was once a longer text on Monument 1, a stela that has been badly eroded. Four full characters survive, separated by horizontal bars. The rectilinear quality of the carving, together



Fig. 3. Inscription carved on Monument 1 at El Portón, Guatemala. Preclassic.

with the bars and the border along the edge, suggest that the prototype for this text was a textile, created on a backstrap loom configured for weaving belts. Such looms are depicted in ancient Mayan art and continue in use among Mayan weavers today.

The first of the surviving characters in the El Portón inscription features a profiled head that faces left, as do the profiled heads in later inscriptions. The character that comes closest to being as readable as those in later texts is the one in the third position, shown above with what may be its Classic counterpart. The Classic sign stands for the number twenty and can be combined with bars and dots to produce larger numbers that usually refer to the age of the current moon or the length of the current synodic month. The crescent shape of the sign alerts the reader to the lunar nature of the number. In Classic inscriptions, lunar information is preceded by dates from the 260-day and 365-day calendars. If the present inscription was organized in a similar way, the missing upper portion may have included such dates.



The early inscription at San Bartolo (figure 4) is painted on a fragment of plaster that was found where it fell on the floor of a room. Despite the use of a brush, the lines have a rectilinear tendency that contrasts with the roundness of later calligraphy and could reflect an aesthetic preference derived from loom weaving. In the last three positions are profiled heads that follow the pattern of later Mayan writing in facing left. The second character from the top may be ancestral to the Classic signs shown at the top of the next page. In either case, a hand holds a pen or brush, and both of the Classic signs are logographs that read *tz'ib'*, "writing."

In the central Guatemalan highlands, on the west side of



Fig. 4. Inscription from a fragment of painted plaster found in the Las Pinturas pyramid at San Bartolo, Guatemala. Preclassic.



what is now Guatemala City, is the massive site of Kaminaljuyu. Engraved on Stela 10 is the longest of all early inscriptions within the Mayan region (figure 5). It is also one of the earliest ones to arrange the characters in double rather than single columns. The grid that underlies the columns and rows once again suggests a sensibility derived from loom weaving. The outlines of some of the characters have the pebblelike shapes that would predominate in later Mayan writing.

The enormous initial character in this inscription gives a divinatory date whose number is 8, written with three dots (valued at one each) and a bar (with a value of five). Written below the number is the day name, given by the left-facing jaguar head of the main sign. The equivalent character in later Mayan texts reads *Ix*, meaning “Jaguar,” but this early version, which is more naturalistic, could have been read as the word for “jaguar” (and for the day of



Fig. 5. Inscription carved on Stela 10 at Kaminaljuyu, Guatemala. Late Preclassic.

that name) in any of the Mesoamerican languages whose speakers were familiar with the divinatory calendar. The same is not true of later Mayan renditions of this day name, in which the head faces forward and three jaguar spots do double duty as facial features, as in the example below. The trefoil device beneath both versions of the name is a specifically Mayan way of marking a day name.



Following the initial 8 Jaguar date in the Kaminaljuyu text is a date from the 365-day calendar. This date is in the first row of the first pair of columns in the main text. It consists of the three bars of the number 15 and (to the right of the number) an ancestral version of the name of the fifth of the twenty-day periods in the 365-day year, whose later reading is *Tzeek*, meaning something like “Penance.” This may be the earliest occurrence of the pairing of dates from these two calendars. The alignment between the two calendars that produced this particular combination is different from

the one that produced most of the combinations in Classic inscriptions. The stela on which it appears belongs to an archaeological period that begins around 300 B.C.E. and continues for three hundred years. A coherent reading of the rest of the text remains to be worked out, and even the question of the language in which it is written remains unresolved.

A COSMIC DIAGRAM

Some of the early Mayan texts that have come to light are inscribed on implements and ornaments. Figure 6 shows a jade ear ornament that was made during the last 250 years of the Preclassic period. It comes from Pomona, a small site in Belize. The characters are arranged in four equally spaced groups around a circle. Again, the profiled heads face left. Just beneath the top and bottom heads are oblong signs marked with human footprints. In Classic texts, such footprints stand for *b'i*, meaning “road.” The top one is headed toward the right, and the bottom one toward the left, indicating that the reader should proceed clockwise from one part of the text to the next.





The text continues in a pair of columns to the right of the dates. The outlines of the characters are clear, but no traces of carving are evident on their surfaces, so they may have been painted. Judging from later inscriptions, the subject of this part of the text was probably the deeds of the person depicted next to it. The billowing clouds above him, the flame-shaped flint at the tip of his staff, and the mask that leaves his eyes and mouth exposed all suggest that he is impersonating Chaak, the god of thunderstorms.

West of El Baúl is the Pacific piedmont site of Tak'alik Ab'aj, where Stela 5 bears the second-oldest of the known long-count dates within the Mayan region.

It is 8.4.5.17.11, equivalent to June 4, 126 C.E. So far, no long-count dates from the Late Preclassic period have turned up in the Mayan lowlands of the north, on the Atlantic side of the highlands. By the time such dates do start turning up in that region, in the Early Classic period, they have ceased to be inscribed anywhere else. The earliest-known northern date, carved on Stela 29 at Tikal, is 8.12.14.8.15, falling on July 6, 292. Early Classic inscriptions continue to have a high proportion of logographic signs, and they tend to be brief, devoting as much or more space to the dating of events as to the events themselves.

Long-count dates are relatively rare until 9.3.0.0.0, which came in 495, but then they begin to appear on monuments at multiple sites in the northern lowlands. After 9.8.0.0.0, which came in 593, they appear at more frequent intervals and in many more places, and their ubiquity is one of the features archaeologists use to define the Late Classic period, which they reckon as beginning in 550 or 600. Inscriptions become longer than before, with more details and more episodes in the stories they tell, and they also become more readable, with a higher proportion of syllabic signs.



Fig. 7. Stela 1 at El Baúl, Guatemala, with divinatory and long-count dates labeled in red. Late Preclassic.



3 The Skilled Observer from Maxam

IN THE EASTERN reach of the Mayan rainforest was a city whose ruins received the name Naranjo in 1905, when an Austrian explorer first reported their existence to the outside world. Thanks to the inscriptions left behind by Mayan writers, we now know the names by which that city was known in its own time: Wak Kab'nal, "Sixth Earth Place," and, more commonly, Maxam, whose meaning is uncertain. The site lies inside present-day Guatemala, a short distance west of the country's border with Belize. Not far north and south of it are the Holmul and Mopán rivers, whose waters reach the Caribbean through northern Belize.

The recorded history of the ruling dynasty of Maxam, so far as it is presently known, runs from 475 to 820 C.E. The official account of the succession of rulers makes a claim to a much deeper past, naming an ancestor who preceded the historical lords of Maxam by many thousands of years. The main theme in the story of the human lords is their struggle to maintain Maxam's position among three more powerful cities. Two of these cities were in the riverless basin of the central lowlands—Calakmul to the north of Maxam and Tikal to the west; the third, Caracol, was in the foothills of the pine-forested Maya Mountains, to the south.

Through most of their history, the lords of Maxam allied themselves with those of Calakmul, but in the early seventh century, they were the objects of coordinated military attacks by Calakmul and Caracol. For a time they were vassals of the lords of Caracol, but in 680, they asserted their independence by attacking and sacking Caracol. In the late seventh century, they lost ground when they found themselves on the losing side of a war in which Tikal defeated Calakmul. They reestablished control of their local domain during the early eighth century, but in 744, Maxam itself was attacked and sacked by Tikal.

The lords who ruled Maxam during the latter half of the eighth century were able to reconstruct their domain once again. The lord who concerns us here is K'ak' Ukalaw Chan Chaak, "Fiery Crack in the Sky Thunderbolt," who ruled from 755 until a few years after 780. He was married to Ix Jub' Ek', or "Lady Shell Star," from a town not far to the west that was under his rule. They had at least two sons, one of whom succeeded his father for a short time and the other of whom ruled from 784 until 814. A third child, whose gender is unknown, has become famous in our time as a writer and painter whose work appears on ceramic vessels for drinking chocolate. In the case of the vessel in figure 8, this artist chose to use a space that would ordinarily be devoted to pictures for diagonal blocks of text (one on each side) and a repeated floral motif. The



Fig. 8. Vessel for drinking chocolate, painted by the skilled observer from Maxam (the site now known as Naranjo). Late Classic.

diagonal texts, along with the horizontal text at the top, have yet to be fully deciphered, but the text at the bottom yields a reasonably clear reading. It runs in a complete circle, but its beginning point is revealed by the view in the photograph. When the vessel is turned toward the viewer with one of the diagonal texts in the center of the field of vision, the bottom text begins with the first character that is fully legible at lower left. Here are the first four characters, together with an alphabetic transcription:



The first three signs spell *utz'ib'*, in which *u-* is “his or hers” and *tz'ib'* is a term that covers writing, painting, and graphic design in general. The second character spells *yaal way*, in which *y-* is “his or hers,” *aal* is “speech,” and *way* means “dream” and sometimes refers to a person’s guardian spirit. As is often the case in Mayan sentences, the verb “to be” is implicit here, so that the first two characters can be translated as follows: “This is the writing, the speaking of the dream.” What this means is that the message contained in the diagonal texts on this vessel was given to the writer in a dream, perhaps by his or her guardian spirit. The third character, which refers to the dreamer, combines *leek'*, referring to a fierce or penetrating gaze, with *itz'at*, meaning “clever, skilled, artistic, wise,” yielding something like “skilled observer.” The fourth and final character reads *Ajmaxam*, “person of Maxam.” Here, then, is a translation that accounts for the opening passage: “This is the writing, the speaking of the dream of a skilled observer, a person from Maxam.”

The passage that introduces the writer is followed by one that identifies his or her mother as a person of royal rank:



The first character spells *yal*, “her child,” referring to a woman’s child of either sex. The second one describes the mother as a *ch’uh k’an ixik*, a lady (*ixik*) who makes offerings by sprinkling (*ch’uh*) gems and other objects of value (*k’an*) on an altar while praying for her subjects, asking for an abundance of children, crops, and wealth. In the third character, she is named as *Ix Jub’ Ek’*, “Lady Shell Star.” The fourth and fifth characters together give her the title *Ix Yax Ha’ Ajaw*, in which *Ix* makes *Ajaw* into a female lord and *Yax Ha’* is a town called “Green Water.” This town once stood on the shore of a lake of the same name, and the ruins and the lake are still known as *Yaxha* today. Last, in the sixth and seventh positions, come characters that assign this town to the *och k’in ajtzuk*, “sun-entering quarter,” meaning that it occupies the western position in a four-directional group of places centered on *Maxam*. We now know that the “skilled observer” who inscribed this vessel is “the child of a lady who offers gems, Lady Shell Star, Lady of Green Lake, in the quarter where the sun sets.”

The inscription around the base of the vessel ends with a passage that identifies the writer’s father:



The first character spells *yune*, “his child,” referring to a man’s child of either sex. The next three describe the child’s father as *ox k’atun ch’ajom*, *ajtok’a’*, an observer of penitential fasts (*ch’ajom*) and a practitioner of sacrificial bloodletting (*ajtok’a’*) during three (*ox*) consecutive periods of the kind called a “score of stones” (*k’atun*), each consisting of $20 \times 360 = 7,200$ days. In the fifth character, the main sign is surrounded by affixes that describe this man as a *ch’uh k’an ajaw* (for which the final *aw* is a phonetic complement), a lord (*ajaw*) who makes offerings in the same manner as his wife. The main sign is *sa*, or *sa’*, which is the name (or perhaps the first syllable of the name) of his dynasty. Possible meanings for *sa’* include “atole,” a drink made from corn flour, and “crossroads.” The last character further describes him as a *sak chuwen*, “lucid artisan.” So this pious man is the “lord who offers gems for the Crossroads, a lucid artisan.”

The text that circles the base of this vase is exceptional in the fullness of its poetic structure. Mayan inscriptions are often highly laconic, as if the writers had left it up to their readers to create parallel verse by supplying missing phrases, but in this case, the structure is already there in the written words. Here is a full translation, broken into lines that display the parallel phrasing:

This is the writing,
the speaking of the dream

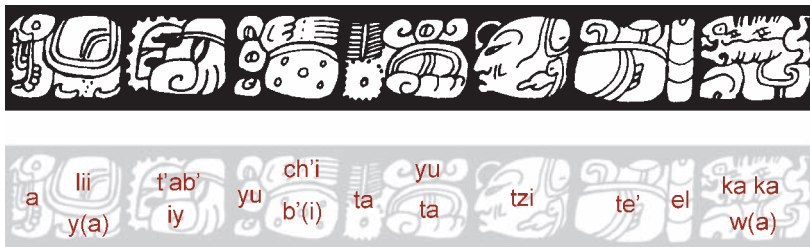
of a skilled observer,
 a person from Maxam,
 born of a lady who offers gems,
 Lady Shell Star,
 Lady of Green Lake,
 in the quarter where the sun sets,
 begotten by a penitent man
 who let his blood for three score stones,
 the lord who offers gems for the Crossroads,
 a lucid artisan.

These words would have been more than enough to reveal the writer's identity to his or her contemporaries, and even now they serve to locate him or her in space and (by way of dynastic records) in time. But they do not include any proper names for the writer, who was content to be known as the skilled observer from Maxam whose parents were the Lady of Green Lake and the lord who offers gems for the Crossroads.

READING THE VASE OF THE SEVEN GODS

One of the most famous Mayan drinking vessels, the Vase of the Seven Gods, has been identified as the work of the Maxam observer (figure 9). The text that circles the vessel just below the rim is a dedication, and the text that runs downward toward the base serves as a caption for the picture. The vessel commemorates two events, one human and the other divine. The human event, recorded in the rim text, occurred early in the life of a child of royal descent. The divine event, recorded in the picture and its caption, was a meeting of the gods on the eve of the creation of the present world. The previous world had fallen into darkness, which is why the artist chose to write and paint in solid black alone.

The rim text begins above the headdress of the god who sits at the front of the top row of three gods. The opening passage follows a sequence that also appears (with differences in calligraphy and spelling) on cylindrical vessels painted by other artists:



The first pair of characters refers to a formal occasion on which the vessel was handed over to the person for whom it was made. *Aliiy* means “it is or was said” or “spoken

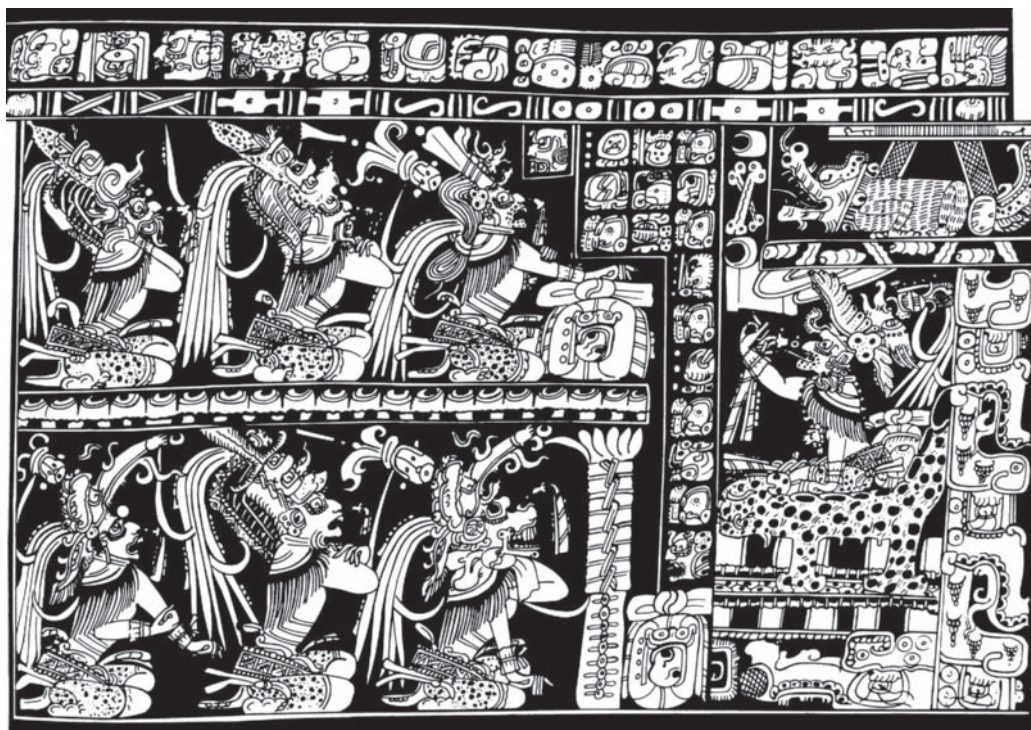


Fig. 9. Rollout view of the painting on the Vase of the Seven Gods, by the skilled observer from Maxam. This vessel is of the same shape as the one in figure 8.

over,” perhaps referring to a blessing, and *t’ab’iy* means “it is or was raised” or “presented.” The subject of these verbs is specified by the *yuch’ib’* of the third character, in which *y-* is “his or her” and *uch’ib’*, literally “drinking instrument,” is the term for the type of vessel on which this inscription appears. The rest of the passage states that the present vessel is *ta yuta*, “for the seeds or fruit,” from a *tzi te’el*, “new grove or orchard,” of *kakam*, “cacao.” In the last character, the upper sign is a picture of a fish (*kay*), but here it is meant to evoke the syllable *ka*, whose twofold repetition in *kakaw* is indicated by the doubling of the # mark on the fish’s body. So far, then, we have something like “It was blessed, it was presented: his or her drinking vessel for the fruit of a new grove of cacao trees.”

The rest of the rim text reveals that the recipient of the vessel and the owner of the cacao trees is a small boy:



The primary meaning of the *chak* prefix of the first of these characters is “red,” but in this context, it carries a sense of “bare” or “smooth skinned” or “not hairy.” It modifies *ch’ok*, literally “sprout or shoot,” a metaphor for a young child who has recently grown from a royal tree. In the second character, *ke* is a phonetic complement for *kelem*, meaning that this child is “strong,” “robust,” or “young.” Next he is described as *ub’a ajub’i*, “the one who is the listener,” presumably listening to the person who presented the vessel to him. The fifth character gives him a royal name reserved for males, K’inich Ajaw, or “Sun-Eyed Lord.” A further name is given by the sixth character, whose main sign reads *b’alam* or “jaguar” and is preceded and followed by appropriate phonetic complements. It carries an additional affix (at lower left) whose value is unknown. The final character identifies Sun-Eyed Lord Jaguar as *yajaw te’*, “the lord (or owner) of the trees,” with the *w(a)* suffix complementing *ajaw*.

Here is a translation of the complete rim text, adjusted to clarify its sense and organized in lines that display its poetic structure:

It was blessed,
it was presented,
this drinking vessel for the fruit
of a new grove of cacao trees.
It belongs to the smooth-skinned sprout,
the young boy who listened,
Sun-Eyed Lord Jaguar,
the owner of the trees.

Several other drinking vessels have inscriptions that combine the mention of cacao from a new grove with the naming of a “sprout” as the vessel’s owner. This fact suggests that the birth of a royal child was marked by the planting of a cacao orchard and that the first fruiting of the trees provided an occasion to celebrate the growth of the child. New cacao trees produce pods as early as the third year and no later than the fifth, which is consistent with the youth of the individuals named on the vessels.

The painter of the present vessel may have considered the newness of the child and the cacao trees when choosing the subject matter for the picture. The seven gods, though they are meeting in the dark, will soon release light into the sky of a renewed world. The three levels on which they sit represent three levels of the cosmos. On the upper border of the highest level, running just below the rim



text, is a band decorated with repeated motifs that identify it as the vault of the sky, and suspended from this band is a crocodilian dragon (see above) that inhabits a river that is

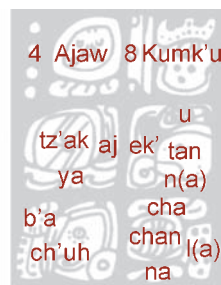
visible in the night sky as part of the Milky Way. The three gods sitting in the upper row and facing the dragon are in the sky. At the head of the row is the god B'alam Ak'ab', or "Jaguar Night," who is sometimes shown sitting in the bow of a celestial canoe with a paddle in his hand.

Resting on the baseline of the painting and facing left are the head and upper jaw of another monster (at right), the subterranean counterpart of the celestial dragon. The three gods seated in the lower row and facing in his direction are in the underworld.



All six of the gods who face right have their arms folded or have one hand resting on the opposite forearm. In this way, they express their submission to the elderly deity who sits before them on the throne (at left), with the celestial and terrestrial monsters above and below him. His position is on the surface of the earth. The main attributes that identify him are the cigar in his mouth and his broad hat, decorated with owl feathers. He has other guises, but in the present one he is the patron deity of merchants, who travel over the earth.

The caption for the picture opens with a double column of six characters, read from left to right and top to bottom. The first line gives a so-called calendar-round date for the event in the picture, combining the day 4 Ajaw or "4 Lord" from the 260-day divinatory calendar with 8 Kumk'u or "8 Kiln" from the calendar of the 365-day year. All texts in the Mayan script, from Classic times right up to the fifteenth-century Dresden Codex, agree in reckoning the final day of the previous world, or the eve of the present world, as 4 Lord 8 Kiln. In the alphabetic work known as the Ritual of the Bacabs, written in Yucatán during the colonial period, the mention of 4 Lord by itself was enough to evoke this distant moment in time.



The second line begins to tell us what is happening in the picture. First comes a verb, *tz'akiyaj*, meaning that something "was put in order" or "arranged," followed by a statement of what is put in order, namely *ek' utan*. The terms "star" and for "black" or "dark" are both *ek'*, so that *ek' utan* could mean both "the stars of the center" and "the darkness of the center." That the artist intended such a play of meaning seems likely, given that he or she clothed all seven gods in kilts made from jaguar pelts and

covered the throne with a complete jaguar pelt. Mayans likened the black-spotted hides of jaguars to the white-spotted night sky, partly because of the sound play provided by *ekʼ*.

The account of the ordering of the present world continues with a series of clauses that repeat the verb *chʼuhbʼa*, whose various objects are given their places in the order of things by a subject who will not be named until the end of the caption. In the first clause, he puts *chanal*, “the sky,” in place. The next clause, located at the top of the single column of characters that completes the caption, is *chʼuhbʼa kabʼal*. Now we have a couplet: “He puts the sky in place, / he puts the earth in place.” But the artist-poet chose not to write these lines in a way that would reflect their parallel structure, instead writing the sky half of the couplet horizontally and the earth half vertically.

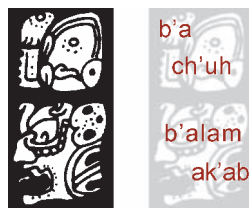


Next comes a couplet whose parallel clauses share not only the verb *chʼuhbʼa* but the use of numbers as well. In the first clause, *9 och teʼ* can be interpreted as “the 9 who enter the tree,” but the bar-and-dot number prefix, though it is literally *bʼolon*, or “nine,” can also be read (by way of sound play) as *bʼoʼlay*, meaning “spotted” or (by way of metonymy) “jaguar.” In chapter 5, we will learn that the tree corresponds to a part of the Milky Way that sometimes stands straight up on the horizon, meaning that the spots of this jaguar could be stars. In the second clause, *3 luut* means “the 3 who were born together,” referring to triplets. These would be the three hearthstones of the earthly Mayan fire-place and the three stars that mark a celestial hearth, as will become clear later.



The next pair of characters combines *chʼuhbʼa* with *jawtechi*, referring to a space like the one inside a house, in this case the space between sky and earth. The final repetition of *chʼuhbʼa* is followed by Bʼalam Akʼabʼ, “Jaguar Night,” the name of the deity who sits at the front of the row of the three figures in the sky. The last character in the

caption identifies the subject by the repeated verb *chʼuhbʼa*, who turns out to be the merchant god seated on the throne, presiding over the scene. His name is Ekʼich Ajaw, “Black-Faced Lord” or “Star-Faced Lord.” He is sometimes depicted with a black face, but here he has black jaguar spots (or stars) around his mouth.



The merchant god’s name has been inserted on the left side of the top row of the caption, as if the poet-artist had run out of space at the bottom and had to look for another place to put it. But there are several reasons for thinking



the name's location was planned. One reason is purely formal: just as the text on the rim of this vase has its last character immediately to the left of the first one, so does the text of the caption. Another reason is the relationship between the caption and the picture: the movement from B'alam Ak'ab' (at bottom right in the caption) to Ek'ich Ajaw (at top left) leads the reader's eye up to the place where Jaguar Night is sitting in the sky, with Black-Faced Lord looking toward him from the level of the earth. Moreover, their names are immediately preceded by a mention of the space that separates earth from sky. A final reason is the temporal relationship between the caption and the rim text: the end of the caption leads the reader out of the mythic dawn of the present world and into the early years of the flesh-and-blood child for whom the vase was made.

Here is a translation of the caption that takes into consideration the double meanings of *ek'*:

On 4 Lord
 8 Kiln,
 the darkness of the center was put in order,
 the stars of the center were put in order.
 The one who gave the sky its place,
 who gave the earth its place,
 who gave the 9 jaguars who entered the tree their places,
 who gave the 3 who were born together their places,
 who gave the open space its place,
 who gave Jaguar Night his place
 was the Black-Faced Lord,
 the Star-Faced Lord.

THE SECRET OF THE THREE BUNDLES

The task remains to translate three characters located within the picture, each of them labeling an object. The objects are cloth bundles, tied shut with bowknots. One of them is in front of Jaguar Night, who rests his right hand on top of it. Another, labeled in exactly the same way, sits on the baseline of the painting, in front of the earth monster's snout. The third bundle is partially hidden behind the cigar-smoking merchant god, resting on his throne. Here are the bundles of Jaguar Night and the god on the throne, with transcriptions of the signs written on them. The label on the bundle at left is prefixed with the bar-and-dot sign for the number 9, *b'olon*, which (as we already know) can also be read as *b'o'lay*, "spotted" (like a jaguar). Next comes a sign for *ek'* that normally

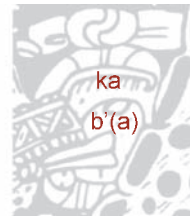
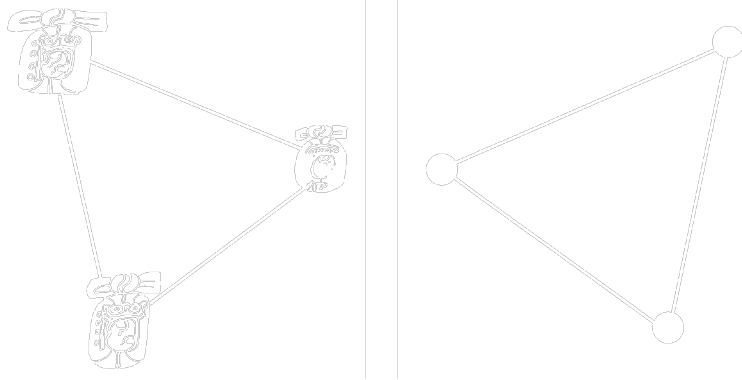




Fig. 10. Detail from the painting in figure 9, with three bundles of starlight highlighted in white.



Map 1. The principal stars of Orion as they appeared while rising in Mayan latitudes during the Classic period. The horizontal line is the horizon, the triangle is that of the hearth-stone stars, and the gray areas mark the Milky Way (to the left) and the M-42 nebula (inside the triangle).



Map 2. The positions of the rising hearthstone stars as they appear on the Vase of the Seven Gods (left) and in the sky (right).



4 From the Time of Gods to the Time of Lords

THE RÍO MOTAGUA rises near the ruins of the capital of the K'iche' kingdom and flows eastward through a canyon that runs between two mountain ranges. As the river nears the Caribbean, it emerges from the canyon and slows down, meandering through a rich floodplain. On this plain and on a tributary of the Motagua that comes down from the south, the Mayans of the Classic period built two towns whose ruins are known today as Quiriguá and Copán. The recorded history of both sites begins in 426 C.E., running until 810 at Quiriguá and 822 at Copán. These were frontier towns, standing at what is still the extreme southeastern reach of the Mayan world. Their main contact with the Mayan lowlands, to the north and northwest, would have been by water, down the Motagua and along the coast of what is now Belize. As for the Mayan highlands to the west, the east-west trend of the major ridges and valleys provided them with easy land routes while impeding access from the north. Not surprisingly, the inscriptions of these two towns provide the clearest points of contact between the recorded history of the lowlands and that of the highlands.

The rulers of Quiriguá and Copán, like their counterparts at other sites, are identified in texts by a character that serves as a heraldic emblem. The main sign in such a character names the local dynasty (or gives the first syllable of the name), but it is affixed with other signs that are similar from one lineage to another, proclaiming the local ruler's status as a peer of other Mayan rulers. Here is an example of the Quiriguá emblem, showing a standard gloss (at center) and an alternative reading of some of the affixes:



The main sign depicts the surface of a ribbed gourd (sometimes more clearly than in this example) and has the phonetic value *tzu*. No such word as *tzu* has been reported for gourd terminology in Ch'olan, the primary language group for Classic texts, but *tzu* and *tzuy* are abundantly documented as terms for gourds in two K'ichean languages of the highlands, K'iche' and Kaqchikel. This fact raises the possibility of a K'ichean origin for the *tzu* sign. Moreover, the authors of the alphabetic Annals of the Kaqchikels state that while their remote ancestors were on a journey to the east, they encountered a nation whose sign (*retal*) was a white gourd (*saq tzuy*). The people of the sign were



This time the prefix reads *ch'uh ul*, meaning that the lord of Copán “sprinkles shells” when he makes offerings. The two elements above the main sign could be read as *ajaw* (as indicated in the first gloss), but there is no additional sign to make the final *aw* explicit. These elements have been written in a way that makes them unmistakably identical with the signs for *po* (or *pop*) and for the day whose K'ichean name is Aj (as indicated in the second gloss), suggesting *pop ajaw*, *ajpop*, or *ajpo*. The titles of the lord of Copán might well have included such a form, as is indicated by the existence, near the main plaza, of a building named Popol Na, “House of the Mat” or “Council House.” The outside of the building is decorated with representations of a mat (*pop*) and with characters identifying the lineages of the council members who met there. Apparently the Copán government, for at least part of its history, was similar to the government of the later K'iche' kingdom in the highlands, as described in the Popol Vuh and other alphabetic sources. The K'iche' council, composed of the heads of twenty-four lineages, met in the Popol Ja, “House of the Mat.” First in rank was an *ajaw*, or “lord,” who held the title *ajpop*, “master of the council.”

The bat profile that serves as the insignia in the Copán emblem suggests two alternative interpretations. If we read it as a syllabic sign, it has the value *xu*. Next, below the bat's ear, comes a sign for *ku* (or *uk*), and below it is a long composite sign for *pik*. These three signs together spell *xwukpik*, the Ch'olan term for the brown-backed solitaire, a bird of the thrush family. The solitaire is plain in appearance but sings one of the most remarkable songs of all the birds in the world. Both the bird and its song are mentioned in the Annals of the Kaqchikels, in a passage about a pilgrimage by the founders of the Kaqchikel royal houses. Their destination was a city, and when their visit was over and they were on their way out, they heard the song of a bird called *chajal siwan*, “guardian of the canyon,” the Kaqchikel term for the brown-backed solitaire.

If we interpret the main sign of the Copán emblem as standing for an entire word (as in the second gloss above), it yields *sutz'*, the Ch'olan term for “bat.” And the bat, like the mat title, the council house, and the brown-backed solitaire, provides a link to the highlands. According to the Annals, the royal insignia of the city visited by the pilgrims was a bat (*sutz'*). This points to the heraldic importance of the bat image in the emblem, which is further indicated by the fact that no alternative sign for the syllable *xu* was ever substituted for it.

Accepting the bat does not require us to abandon the bird, once we take poetics into consideration. A skilled Mayan reader of the Copán emblem might have said something like “Lord who offers shells for the Solitaires, / Lord of the Bats,” and might have brought *ajpop* into play as well.

A further link to the Annals is provided by the inscription on Stela A at Copán, which was dedicated in 731. It lists the Bat (or Solitaire) rulers of Copán as members of a group of four royal houses, each of them in a city that held a position in a four-directional scheme. The emblems corresponding to the four positions are displayed here in the order in which they are written on the stela:



The first and last emblems in the sequence (at the far left and right) are those of the rulers of the eastern and western cities, with the Bats of Copán in the east (appropriately enough) and the B'akha', or "Egrets," of Palenque in the west, on the opposite frontier of the Mayan world. The directional roles assigned to the other two cities, when understood in astronomical terms, are nadir and zenith (named in that order), but when Mayans mapped this axis onto the surface of the earth, they assigned nadir to the south and zenith to the north. In the present scheme, the nadir role is assigned to the Muutals, or "Hair Knots," of Tikal (named by the second emblem above), and the zenith belongs to the Kaans, or "Snakes," of Calakmul (named by the third emblem), directly north of Tikal.

Beginning in the second half of the eighth century, the Bats of Copán further asserted the importance of their city by rewriting their emblem. Here are the versions that appear on the platform of Temple II, dedicated in 769, and on Stela II, dedicated in 820:



The new element is the sign to the right of the bat's cheek, written in somewhat different ways. It reads *pu* or *puh*, which is a Ch'olan term for cattails. What this tells us is that Copán had become the kind of Mesoamerican city that was known (in various languages) as a Place of Cattails, a city where pilgrims could seek elevation to the rank of lords or confirmation of their status as lords. Cattails were an effective symbol for such cities because they grow in dense, interconnected groups and because lords sat on mats or thrones made from plaited cattail leaves, not only among Mayans but all over Mesoamerica.

During the Early Classic period, the ultimate Place of Cattails had been the cosmopolitan city of Teotihuacan, far to the west in the central Mexican highlands. During the fourth and fifth centuries, the highland city whose ruins are known as Kaminaljuyu, located within the limits of present-day Guatemala City, had undergone an extensive renovation that transformed it into an eastern counterpart of Teotihuacan.

If a four-directional group of cattail places existed at that time, the eastern and western positions would have belonged to Kaminaljuyu and Teotihuacan. But by the time the Bats of Copán asserted their city's eastern position in a group of four and proclaimed it a Place of Cattails, Teotihuacan had been abandoned and Kaminaljuyu was no longer a major center. In effect, the rulers of Copán were claiming their share of an ideological inheritance.

The Annals of the Kaqchikels also mentions a group of four cities, describing their locations as eastern, western, in the underworld (corresponding to south), and in the sky (corresponding to north). It gives all four of them the title Tulan, meaning "Place of Cattails" in Nahuatl, the principal language of central Mexico. One of the four is the city of the solitary song and the bat emblem, which is to say Copán.

The stela that describes Copán's position in a four-directional scheme was commissioned by the Lord of Bats who came thirteenth in the line of succession, ruling from 695 to 738. Here is his name:



It reads Waxaklajuun Ub'ah K'awiil, or "Scepter of Eighteen Bodies." Except for the substitution of K'awiil, or "Scepter," for Chan, or "Serpent," this is the Ch'olan name of a celestial dragon whose body, like that of a centipede, is divided into eighteen segments. The number of segments is the same as that of the 20-day divisions of the 365-day year. When the image of this dragon took the form of a scepter, it was not depicted in an upright position, held in one hand, but was shown cradled across both forearms.

The dragon named Serpent of Eighteen Bodies was a source of power for warriors, but the lord named Scepter of Eighteen Bodies brought glory to Copán by sponsoring works of art and architecture more than by waging war. Nevertheless, he was destined for a violent end. The story of his demise, so far as it is known, begins in 724, when he traveled to Quiriguá to conduct a ceremony to install a new Lord of the Gourds in office. Here is the name of the new lord:



He is K'ahk Tiliw, "Fiery Splendor." The presence of the Copán lord at his installation has been interpreted as meaning that lords of the Gourd lineage were vassals of lords of the Bat lineage, when in fact it may simply mean that the only legitimate way to become a reigning lord was to be installed by someone who was already a reigning lord. Such a rule governs succession among the heads of present-day K'iche' patrilineages.

preceded and transcended human history. There had been a time when the gods, like the ancestors, were fully present as actors in the physical world, but once they had finished the task of preparing the stage for human actors, they withdrew into a spiritual world of their own. Instead of conversing with humans face-to-face, they sent coded messages through omens, dreams, visions, divination, and the movements of the sun, moon, and planets among the stars. By decoding these messages, Mayan rulers hoped to align their thoughts and actions with those of the gods.

The narrative on the mythic side of Stela C, like hundreds of other Classic inscriptions, begins with a group of characters that Mayanists term the Initial Series (IS). Most of these characters are devoted to the dating of an event that is described later, but they are preceded by an Initial Series Introductory Glyph (ISIG) that often occupies four times as much space as the characters that follow. The visual effect is similar to that of the large capital letter that sometimes begins a new chapter in an alphabetic book. At the top of the text on the east side of Stela C is this version of the ISIG:



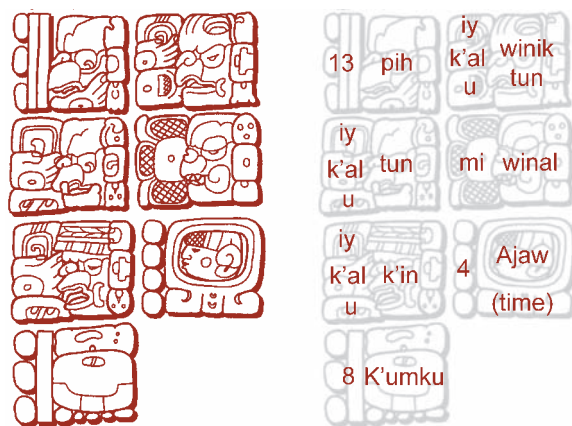
Running across the top is the sign for *tzik*, a Ch'olan transitive verb with a third-person singular subject who is counting or quantifying something. The sign below this one is composed of a pair of elements that mirror one another, standing for *winik*, a term for “twenty” that sometimes serves as a metonym, by way of the number of human digits, for “person.” The present version of this sign is rather abstract, but sometimes the elements bear a clearer resemblance to a pair of hands.

At the third level down is a sign that diagrams a slit drum (or slit gong), a horizontal hollowed log with slits that divide its upper surface into areas that produce different tones when struck. The small oval in the lower half of the sign represents the hole drilled in the center of the bottom of a slit drum. The Yukatek term for this drum is *tunk'ul*, and the Ch'olan term must have been similar. The diagram simply reads *tun*, which means “stone” and is also the term for a period of 360 days. At a few Classic sites, notably Dos Pilas, a syllabic sign with the value *b'i* is sometimes suffixed to the *tun* sign, indicating that it was locally read as *haab'*, a term that normally refers to a period of 365 days. In the alphabetic Chilam Balam books, written in Yukatek during the colonial period, the term for the 360-day period was *tun*, and the term *haab'* was reserved for the 365-day year.

Now we know that the object of *tzik*, the verb of counting, is a unit of time called *winik tun*, lasting $20 \times 360 = 7,200$ days. The Yukatek term for this period is *k'atun*, in which *k'a-* is an alternative way of expressing “twenty.” Either term can mean “twenty stones,” but because Mayan numeration is vigesimal (going by twenties) rather than

orator might have said or brought to mind on the occasion of a dedication, we should include both the drum and the stones, constructing a pair of phrases like this one: “Snake counts the scores of drumbeats,/the scores of stones.” The orator, perhaps chanting to the accompaniment of a drum, could have elaborated the phrasing further, invoking alternative words for the subject matter of the ISIG before moving on.

After the announcement that a counting of scores of stones is taking place comes the rest of the Initial Series, which specifies the time of an event in terms of three or more calendars that run concurrently. The temporal statement that follows the ISIG on the east side of Stela C runs as follows:



Reading from left to right and top to bottom, the first five characters express the date in terms of the long count, which measures the number of days that have elapsed since a hypothetical zero point in the remote past. Each character is prefaced with a number, and the main sign gives the name of the period corresponding to each place, which is omitted in the early long counts discussed in chapter 2. In this case, all five names are indicated by the profiled heads of the corresponding deities, though some other inscriptions spell them out. The name of the highest (and longest) period is *pih*, “bundle,” consisting of four hundred periods lasting 360 days each, so that the total number of days in a bundle is 144,000. The name of the shorter period that comes next, as we have already seen, is *winik tun*, “score of stones,” and its length is $20 \times 360 = 7,200$ days. The next period is simply *tun*, “stone,” and is 360 days long. Next to last is the *winal*, or “score,” lasting 20 days, and finally the *k'in*, “sun” or “day,” in the place reserved for periods shorter than a score of days.

In this inscription, the sign for the highest period, the bundle, is prefixed with the three dots and two bars of the number 13. So far, then, the count of days stands at $13 \times 144,000 = 1,872,000$. The next four signs for periods all carry prefixes that have the effect of “zero,” but they express this concept in two ways. The second, third, and fifth prefixes read *uk'al*, which means that something “was grasped,” or “closed,” or “completed.” In the context of counting, they indicate that the number 20 has been completed in the place where this prefix appears and has passed its value to the next-higher place, just as the sign for zero in a decimal number means that the number 10 has

been completed. Appropriately, the three signs that spell *u-k'al-iy* read upward, in the direction of the next higher place. The fourth prefix, referring to scores of days, is different from the others, because the count of this period tops out at 18 (to make a total of 360 days). Accordingly, the writer chose not to use a term that implies the number 20, instead using *mi*, meaning “no” or “nothing.”

The full five-place number in this inscription is 13.0.0.0.0. By a backward reckoning of the Gregorian calendar, the zero date from which this count of thirteen bundles started was April 2, 8239 B.C.E., and the date of its completion was August 11, 3114 B.C.E. The two characters that follow the long-count number give the corresponding calendar-round date, which is the same one we saw on the Vase of the Seven Gods in chapter 3: 4 Ajaw 8 Kumk'u, “4 Lord 8 Kiln.” The date on the stela is followed by an account of the same event that is painted on the vase, with differences in the details. The stela version has the gods using three stones to construct a triangular hearth whose name is given by the character to the right. The left-



hand prefix reads *yax*, “new” or “first.” Next comes a triangular arrangement of three similar signs that collectively stand for *ox*, “three,” and individually for *tun*, the word for “stone.” The sign on top of the stones, coming last in the reading order, is the suffix *-nal*, meaning “place,” and the character as a whole yields Yax Ox Tunal, “First Three Stone Place.” Elsewhere in the inscription, each stone is described as being “wrapped,” which is how they are pictured in the painting. Each one is then “planted” in a particular location and given a name.

The first stone is planted by two gods who are sometimes shown paddling at the prow and stern of a canoe, known as the Jaguar paddler (equivalent to Jaguar Night in the vase painting) and the Stingray paddler (because he wears a stingray spine as a nose ornament). They plant their stone, named the Jaguar Platform Stone, in the *naj chan*, or “far sky.” The corresponding bundle in the vase painting would be the one at the level of the sky, and the corresponding star would be Rigel, the highest of the hearthstone stars in Orion.

A god named Ik'an Chak Chan, “Dawn Red Snake,” plants the second stone in the *ch'akem kab'*, “parted earth,” and its name is Snake Platform Stone. The equivalent bundle in the painting would be the one at the subterranean level, and the star would be Saiph, the lowest of the hearthstone stars.

Last comes the Water Platform Stone, which is planted *ch'a chan*, or “where the sky lies down,” perhaps meaning the horizon. The corresponding bundle in the painting would be the one in the intermediate zone, where the merchant god is enthroned, and the star would be Alnitak, lower than Rigel but higher than Saiph when the three of them rise. The god who plants this stone possesses an obsidian mirror for scrying, and his name, Itzamnaaj, means something like “Far Seer.” Like the merchant god of the painting, he is elderly, and the two of them may represent two aspects of the same god.

Alternatively, the carver of the stela and the painter of the vase may have had different views as to which god had control of the third bundle.

Considered on a larger scale than that of Rigel, Saiph, and Alnitak, the stars of Orion were seen as sea turtle. An image in the Madrid Codex, a book in the Mayan script that dates from the early colonial period, shows the turtle with the hearthstones, represented by three *tun* signs, on its back (figure 11). The band at the top represents the vault of the sky, and the two sun signs just below it show the course of the ecliptic. The stone-bearing turtle's placement below the sun signs reflects the fact that the stars of Orion are lower in the sky than the ecliptic. Orion lies outside the narrow confines of the Western zodiac, but the Mayan zodiac had a wider reach in areas with no bright stars close to the ecliptic. It consisted of thirteen (rather than twelve)

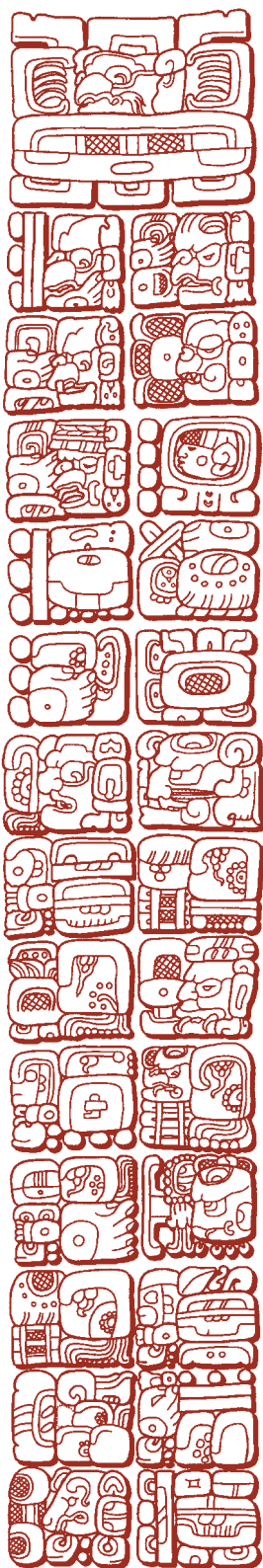


Fig. 11. A sky band (at the top), two sun signs (just below the band), and a sea turtle with three stones on its back (suspended below the sun). From the Madrid Codex.

signs, and the thirteenth position in the sequence was occupied by the turtle in Orion.

At the end of the Quiriguá account of the First Three Stone Place comes a mention of another event that took place on the same occasion as the arrangement of the hearthstones. The actor in this event was a god named Wak Chan Ajaw, "Lord of the Sixth Sky," who ruled the sixth place in the Mayan zodiac. His domain included the stars of Scorpius, which were envisioned as a centipede in some places and a scorpion in others. As we will see in the next chapter, he was also associated with a portion of the Milky Way that was interpreted as an enormous tree when it stood straight up on the southwest horizon, with the centipede or scorpion at its base. According to the present inscription, *uch'oy*, "it arose" (in the sense of getting up from a horizontal position), which may mean that the tree stood up. When the tree is seen standing in the early evening, the hearthstones appear in the east in the middle of the night and reach the meridian in the early morning. According to the Chilam Balam book from Tizimín, the stars that reach this position in the early morning after the last day of a score of stones forecast the character of the next score. This position may have been the one envisioned for the hearthstones in the dawn that followed the completion of thirteen bundles of stones on 4 Lord 8 Kiln.

The inscription from the east side of Stela C at Quiriguá is presented and translated in its entirety on the next page.



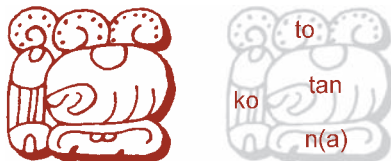


9.14.0.0.0, running from March 16, 692, to December 3, 711. He then lived through the next three scores, which ended on 9.17.0.0.0, or January 22, 771, and found himself still alive during a fifth score, the one that would end on 9.18.0.0.0. His actual birth date is not known, but he would have been between sixty-three and eighty-three years old (by Western reckoning) when he dedicated Stela C. He died without seeing a sixth score, on 9.17.14.13.2, or July 9, 785. He would have been between seventy-three and ninety-three years old at the time.

The complete inscription from the west side of Stela C is presented and translated on page 57. The ellipsis in the translation corresponds to an undeciphered sign in the text.

5 Cormorant and Her Three Sons

IN THE FAR west, on the opposite side of their world from Copán and Quiriguá, Mayans built a city on the banks of clear streams that rush down from the mountains of Chiapas, headed for Tabasco and the Gulf of Mexico. The ruins of temples, houses, and a ball court are on slopes and in hollows, enfolded in a rainforest, but the savannas of the coastal plain are visible from the high palace at the center. Since the early nineteenth century, when its ruins first came to world attention, this city has been known by the Spanish name Palenque. But now that the inscriptions in its temples and palaces can be read, its original name has come to light, spelled out in characters like this one.



The curled shapes across the top, which are intended to resemble billowing clouds, stand for the syllable *to*, and in combination with the *ko* prefix on the left side, they spell *toko*, “cloud.” The main sign, which stands for *tan*, “center,” rests on a phonetic complement whose syllabic value is *na* (with the final syllable not pronounced). The result is Tokotan, “Cloudy Center.” This name is an apt description of Palenque, whose slopes are often enshrouded by clouds that sometimes hang low enough to obscure the buildings.

The rulers of Palenque identified themselves with an emblem that is written in these two ways, among others. In both versions, the prefix combines the verb *ch’uh*, referring to the sprinkling or casting of offerings, with signs whose exact reading is uncertain. We do know that when similar signs are used in pictures, they represent shells. The person offering these shells is an *ajaw*, or “lord,” and possibly a *pop ajaw*, “master of the council.” In the upper version of the emblem, the main sign is a logograph in the form of the profiled head of a snowy egret, with the upper part of its long bill bent upward to fit the space, and it reads *b’akha’*, “egret.” The lower emblem replaces the egret with two signs, one above the other. The main sign represents the cross-section of a bone and reads *b’ak*, “bone.” The lower sign stands for the syllable *ha’*, so that the two signs together spell *b’akha’*.



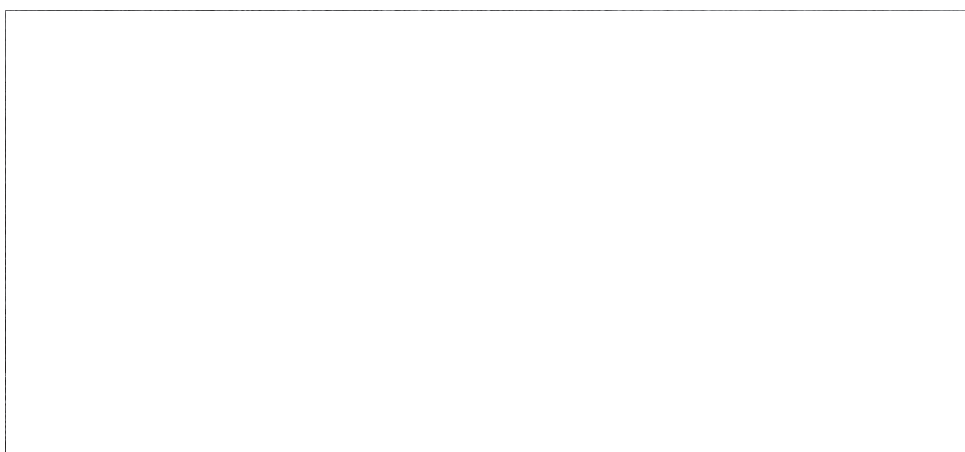
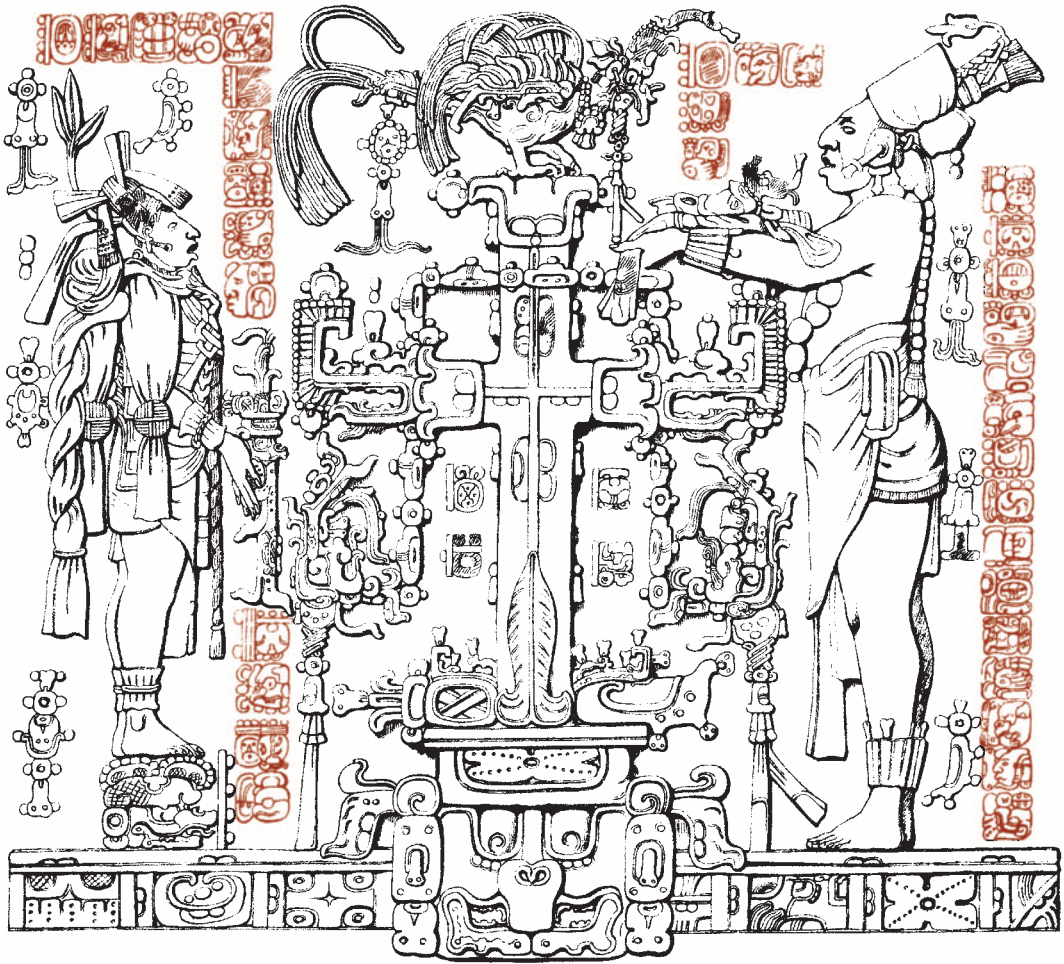


Fig. 12. The Late Classic temples of the Cross (left), Sun (right), and Foliated Cross (between the other two in the distance) at Palenque, in Chiapas. Behind them is the slope of Quetzal Ridge. The partially excavated building in the foreground is a later addition.



On 9 Night 6 Point, he was taken up inside the temple, he was given his burden, his duty, this sprout from the tree—

this ballplayer with the segmented guardian spirit, this flower of Sun-Eyed Corn Tassel Shield, this child of a lady who gives offerings, Lady Medicine.

After 17 and 8 score days plus 1 stone, on 13 Lord 18 Yellow Sun, he came down.

On 8 Dog 3 Song, the white paper was handed to him, to Sun-Eyed Snake Jaguar—

this ballplayer with the segmented guardian spirit. 6 and 11 score days plus 6 stones after the white paper was handed to him, there was a delay in the movement of the divine triplets. On the 3rd day, he summoned the ghost of the namesake of the lady of the sky, a wise woman, and she handed the white paper to Sun-Eyed Snake Jaguar with the segmented guardian spirit, lord who offers shells for the Egrets.





Fig. 14. Two images of the Tonsured Maize God, showing corn silk coming out of the top of his head. The one at left is a detail from an Early Classic vase from Tikal, Guatemala; the other is a detail from a Late Classic mural painted by Mayan artists at Cacaxla, in central Mexico.

Mars periods of 780 days each plus 360 more days. The added days take Mars from its first to its second stationary point (thus completing retrograde motion) and then to the end of its visibility in the night sky, when it is last seen setting in the west shortly after sunset. The writer expresses the disappearance of Mars in two ways, saying that Corn Silk (or his guardian) arrived at *matawil*, or “invisibility,” and that “he touched the earth” when he was invisible.

Cormorant responds to the disappearance of Corn Silk by doing penance, fasting and letting blood so that he can eventually rise again (or be reborn) in the sky. In the other temples, we will learn that she does the same thing for his brothers, Sun-Eyed Lord of the Shield (in chapter 6) and Young Mirror Scepter (in chapter 7). In the present passage the writer describes her as “3 times a mother,” but the mothering in question is a matter of bringing about spiritual rebirth through sacrifice rather than giving birth from a womb.

The time interval that reaches the next event starts from the emergence of Cormorant on the long-count date 12.19.13.4.0, near the end of the previous era, and arrives at a calendar-round date written as 9 Ik’ chum Sak, “9 Wind at the seating of White.” This date is correct as stated, but there are two errors in the interval number. Judging from several other inscriptions, the number should have been written as “2 and 6 score days [not 11 score days], 7 stones, 0 scores of stones [not 1 score of stones], and 2 bundles of stones.” The total length of the corrected interval, 290,642 days, comes within an hour and a half of equaling 9,842 synodic months. Thus, the moon for Cormorant’s new event, like the moon that attended her emergence, was reckoned as being in its fifth day of visibility.

Expressed in long-count terms, the event of 9 Wind at the seating of White took place on 2.0.0.10.2 in the present era, equivalent to September 5, 2325 B.C.E. On that day, a *sak huun*, or “white paper,” was handed over to Cormorant. The question of who gave it to her is left unanswered. Whatever the source might have been, the white paper positions her as a divine predecessor of the Egret lords of Palenque, who will later pass on a white paper inscribed with sacrificial blood from generation to generation.

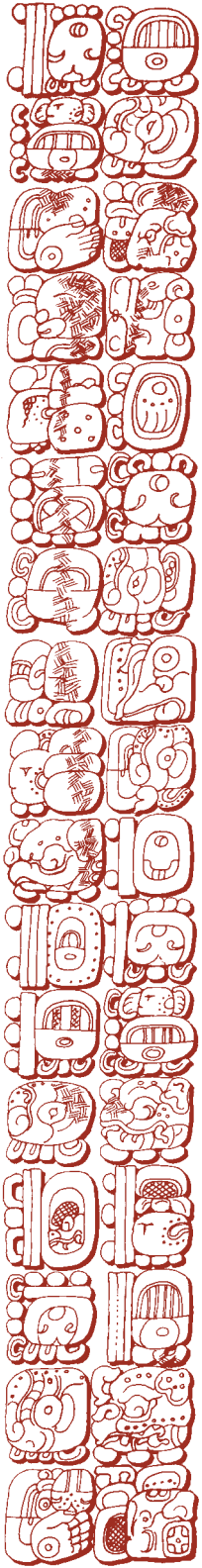












6 Temple of the Sun-Eyed Shield

THE TEMPLE OF the Sixth Sky at Palenque shares its plaza with two other temples built by Sun-Eyed Snake Jaguar. These two face each other, with the Temple of the Sun-Eyed Shield to the west and the Temple of the Tree of Yellow Corn (the subject of the next chapter) to the east. The façade of the Temple of the Sun-Eyed Shield, with three entrance doors, is still intact (figure 15). Beyond the central door is an inside door that opens into the chapel, and inside the chapel is a further door that opens into the sanctuary. Like the sanctuaries in the other two temples, this one is a miniature house with a carved stone tablet on its back wall.

In the picture at the center of the tablet (see the facing page), the standing figures are again Sun-Eyed Snake Jaguar at the ages of seven (left) and forty-nine (right), and again the captions (shown in red) refer to his designation as his father's successor and his actual accession to the Egret lordship. Both figures bear emblems of lordship in their outstretched hands. The boy holds a bundle of folded paper (the "white paper" mentioned in the caption) and, resting on top of it, the Flint Icon (named in the captions of the picture on the tablet in the Temple of the Tree of Yellow Corn). The man holds a figurine of Young Mirror Scepter.

Between the two figures, supported by crossed spears, is the Sun-Eyed Shield that gives this temple its name. The face on the shield belongs to K'inich Ajaw Pakal, or "Sun-Eyed Lord of the Shield," whose guardian spirit is visible not as the sun but as the planet Jupiter. The shield rises over a four-cornered royal dais that stands for the

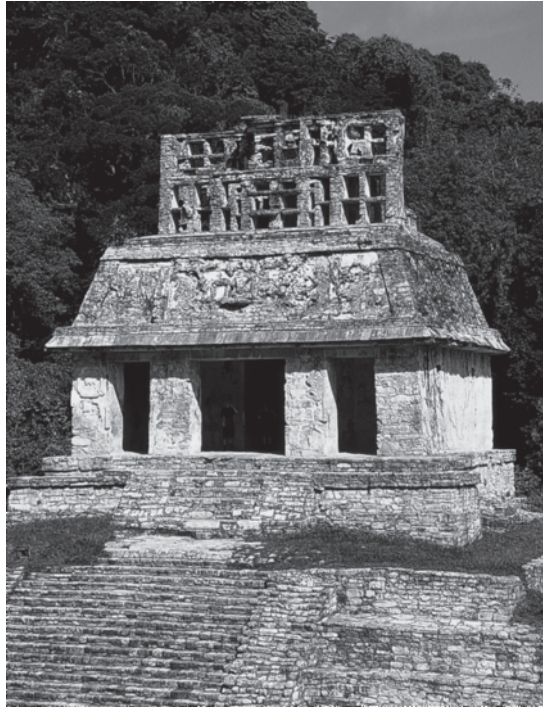


Fig. 15. The Temple of the Sun-Eyed Shield at Palenque. The three doors open into an entrance hall, beyond which are a chapel and sanctuary.

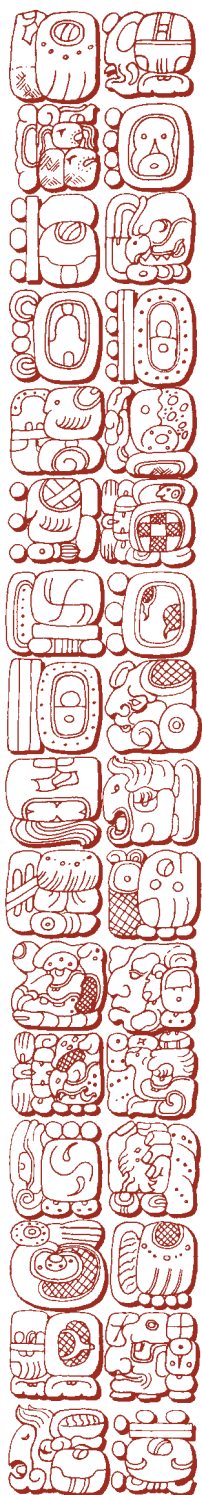


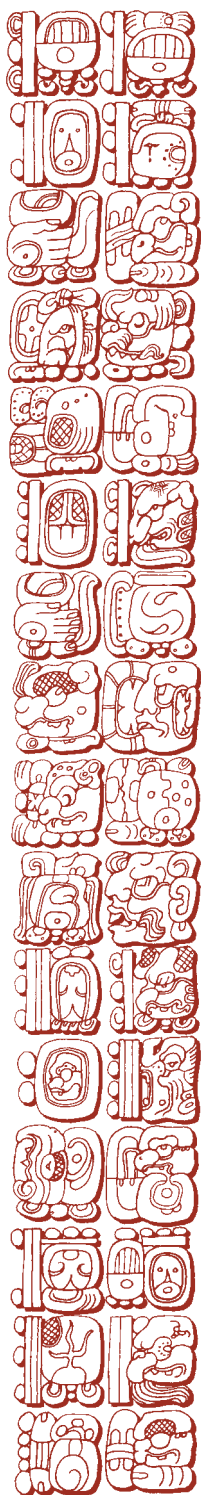
On 9 Night 6 Point, he was taken up
inside the temple, he entered the tree,
this ballplayer with the segmented
guardian spirit. On 13 Lord 18 Yellow
Sun, he came down, this tender sprout,
this small creature . . . with the segmented
guardian spirit, this flower of the
lord who offers everything for the Egrets.

On 8 Dog 3 Song, the white paper was
handed to him, to Sun-Eyed Snake
Jaguar with the segmented guardian
spirit, this flower of the lord who saw
5 score stones, Sun-Eyed Shield, this
child whose mother is Lady Medicine,
this lord who makes offerings for
the Egrets.











7 Temple of the Tree of Yellow Corn

THE LAST OF the three temples built by Sun-Eyed Snake Jaguar at Palenque is directly across the plaza from the Temple of the Sun-Eyed Shield, whose main door frames a view of it (figure 16). The façade has fallen away, exposing the tall door to the chapel. Once again, the sanctuary takes the form of a miniature house, with a sculpted tablet filling its back wall.

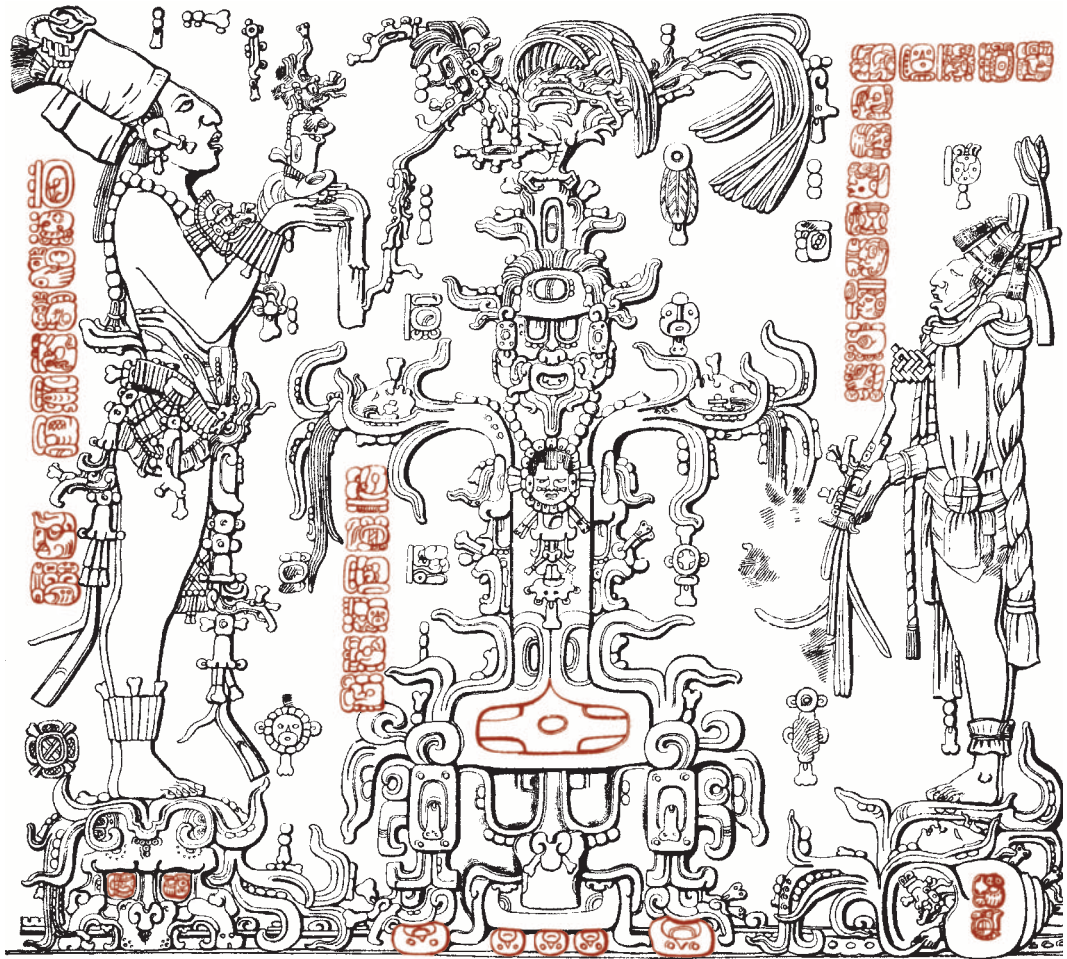
This time the seven-year-old Sun-Eyed Snake Jaguar stands on the right side of the picture at the center of the tablet, and his forty-nine-year-old self stands on the left (see the facing page). In the middle is a representation of the K'anäl Te', or "Tree of Yellow Corn," the icon that gives this temple its name. Its branches bear ears of corn with silk hanging out, and the corn inside the husks takes the form of the heads of the twin gods of corn. The actual icon would have been made of wood and festooned with ears and leaves of corn, together with jewelry.

In the first of the temples, that of the Sixth Sky (in chapter 5), the two figures of Sun-Eyed Snake Jaguar stand on the path of the sun, moon, and planets. In the Temple of the Sun-Eyed Shield (in chapter 6), their feet rest on the floor of a cave. Now we see them on the surface of the earth, but not in ordinary places. The boy stands on a conch shell, named by the characters on its side (shown in red) as K'anäl Jub' Matawil, "Yellow Corn in the Conch of Invisibility." This is the name of an exit from the underworld where celestial lights emerge after a period of disappearance. Just as the emergence, disappearance, and reappearance of celestial lights were seen as an allegory of human birth, burial, and spiritual return, so were the sprouting, planting, and return of corn.

As a man, Sun-Eyed Snake Jaguar stands on the split skull of a monster named by the characters in its eyes as Yax Jan Witz, "First Corn Tassel Mountain." It was from a cleft in the top of this mountain that corn and other food plants were retrieved after being hidden underground at the end of the world previous to the present one.



Fig. 16. The Temple of the Tree of Yellow Corn (or Foliated Cross) at Palenque, seen through the center door of the Temple of the Sun-Eyed Shield.



On 8 Foot 3 Song, the white paper was presented to him, to Sun-Eyed Snake Jaguar. He renovated the temple of Quetzal Jaguar, Lord at Cloudy Center.

When he entered the tree, he joined the first among all sprouts, One Lord. The Red Snake was lying face down together with Akan, unseen, when he received the mirror scepter—

Here in the sanctuary of the home of spirits is the ballplayer with the segmented guardian spirit, Sun-Eyed Snake Jaguar, lord who makes offerings for the Egrets.

this flower of the lord who saw 5 score stones, Sun-Eyed Corn Tassel Shield, lord who offers shells for the Egrets.

First Corn
Tassel Mountain

YELLOW

CORN

Yellow Corn in the
Conch of Invisibility

The Tree of Yellow Corn stands on the head of an earth monster with a cruciform sign (in red) on its forehead. This sign reads *k'an*, and it has a suffix consisting of the five small, upside-down faces that run along beneath the head. In this position, the faces serve as a visual pun on corn kernels planted in the earth, but their phonetic value, which is *al*, completes the word *k'anal*, meaning “yellow corn.”

Among the gods mentioned in the right-hand caption, Jun Ajaw, or “One Lord,” has a strong association with the planet Venus. Chak Chan, or “Red Snake,” appears in the Quiriguá account of the New Three Stone Place, which describes him as planting his stone in the earth, but little else is known about him. Akan, a god of alcoholic beverages, resides among the fixed stars. He and One Lord also show up in the text to the right of the picture.

The same caption informs us that Sun-Eyed Snake Jaguar received the mirror scepter, marking him as a future lord, when he was young. A forty-two-year wait lay ahead of him. His father, who is named here as K'inich Janab' Pakal, or “Sun-Eyed Corn Tassel Shield,” served as the Egret lord from the age of twelve to the age of eighty, from 615 to 683. The Temple of the Inscriptions, on the opposite side of the aqueduct from the three temples under discussion here, was built to serve as his tomb. Construction probably began during his reign, but his son was the one who finished the job.

Again, the columns of text on either side of the picture assign dates to the events in the story they tell, whether the actors are gods (see pages 93–94) or humans (pages 95–96). The story of the conjunction of three planets at Sixth Sky is completed with the introduction of Young Mirror Scepter, whose guardian spirit is Saturn. In a sense, he is present in all three temple texts, each of which mentions a directional ritual involving the object called the mirror scepter. But in the present temple, care is taken to distinguish the deity from the object. Among the characters illustrated below, the first one gives the object its usual name, *nehn k'awiil*, or “mirror scepter”:



The first reference to the deity is made by the second character, which reads *k'awinal winik*, “scepter person” or “scepter personified.” His name is then given by the pair of characters at right, the first of which reads *ch'ok*, or “sprout,” meaning that he is young. In the second member of the pair, his status as a young person becomes visible in the full figure of an infant. The *k'a* sign from the scepter character now emanates from his brow, and though the *nehn* sign is still present, mounted on his forehead, an alternative sign for *nehn* appears in front of the *k'a*. If we follow current practice and read the fig-

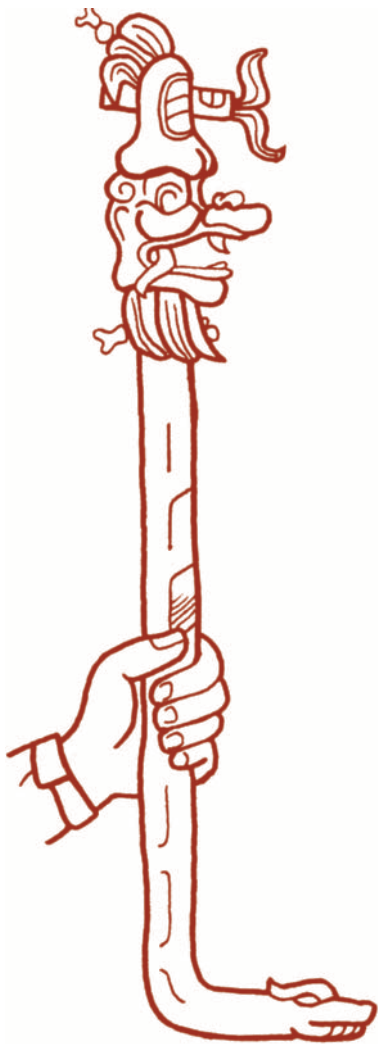


Fig. 17. An image of Young Mirror Scepter, held in the hand of a ruler. A flaming torch runs through his head, and the mark on his forehead represents a mirror. The handle takes the form of a snake with its head at the lower end. Detail from a stucco relief in the tomb of Sun-Eyed Snake Jaguar's father, beneath the Temple of the Inscriptions at Palenque.

ure itself as a logograph for *k'awiil*, the complete name comes out as Ch'ok Nehn K'awiil, "Young Mirror Scepter."

The sign for *k'a* in the first and last characters represents a two-tongued flame, and in other contexts it can serve as a logograph for *k'abh*, meaning "fire." This choice among signs for *k'a* keeps the reader mindful of the fact that Young Mirror Scepter is a source of power in the form of fire. He is represented with a flaming torch or an ax blade stuck through his head, emerging from a mirror mounted on his forehead. In sculpted images, he often takes the form of a scepter held in the hand of a ruler (figure 17). When scepters incorporate his whole body, one of his legs takes the form of a serpent that serves as a handle, but in the example shown here, the serpent handle takes the place of his body. Similar scepters were used by K'iche' lords up to the time of the Spanish invasion, and they survive today in the axes carried by the characters in the Rabinal Achi dance-drama, performed in the K'iche' town of Rabinal.

The opening of the text that deals with Young Mirror Scepter follows a pattern that is familiar from the other temples. First comes a long-count date, 1.18.5.4.0, corresponding to November 6, 2360 B.C.E. Both the numbers and the names of the periods are represented by the profiled heads of the corresponding deities, and a head also serves as the first number in the calendar-round date, Jun Ajaw 13 Mak, or "One Lord 13 Turtle." Next comes the lord of the night, followed by the current moon and, finally, by the most recent scepter rite. The inter-

val number for the rite is correct, but the calendar-round date should have been written as 1 Imix 19 Pax, or "1 Ceiba 19 Drum." The stated date, 1 Kawak 7 Yax, or "1 Portal 7 Green," resulted from adding the interval to the long-count number rather than subtracting it. If the person who made the calculations was someone other than the author of the text, the author simply repeated the error.

After the account of the scepter rite comes an announcement of the event that took place on 1.18.5.4.0, which was the birth (or rise) of the guardian spirit of Young Mirror



Map 4. The eastern sky at Palenque, shortly before dawn on July 23, 690. Venus, between Taurus and Gemini in the middle of the Milky Way, is the morning star. The arching line in the right-hand version of the map marks the path of the sun.

and from the place where the sun, moon, and planets cross the Milky Way near the centipede to the place where they cross the opposite side of the Milky Way, not far from the hearthstones in Orion (map 4).

The description of what was happening in the eastern morning sky is highly condensed, something like the information in the astronomical tables of the Dresden Codex. First comes the mention of an *ek' way*, or “star guardian,” who is like the three planets on the other side of the sky in being a Chaak, or “Thunderbolt.” Next, the current location of this planet is identified as the home of Akan, a god of alcoholic beverages whose stars are at the crossroads between Taurus and Gemini. His name is followed by the epithet Nichaj, “Destroyer,” perhaps referring to his habit of chopping off his own head. After that comes the name of the god who had the planet as his guardian spirit: Jun Ajaw, or “One Lord,” one of the hero twins. At the crossroads on July 21–23, 690, was Venus (see map 4), the brightest of all the planets and stars. Venus serves as a guardian or a source of power for different gods on different occasions, but it must have been assigned to One Lord at this time because it had begun its current term as the morning star on a day named Ajaw, or “Lord.” It was 10 Lord, to be exact, corresponding to April 16, 690.

Near the end comes an interval that moves the story into the future, reaching the completion of the current score of stones and the long-count date 9.13.0.0.0, corresponding to March 16, 692. But the final words take the reader back to July 21–23, 690, “when he went into seclusion, when Sun-Eyed Snake Jaguar, lord who makes offerings for the Egrets, was alone.”

The four double columns from the tablet in the Temple of the Tree of Yellow Corn are presented and translated on the next four pages.







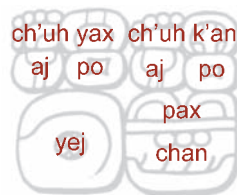




8 Lady Shark Fin and the Evening Star

THE RÍO USUMACINTA makes a great horseshoe bend in the rainforest, halfway between its headwaters in the Guatemalan highlands and its end in the Gulf of Mexico. Inside the bend, on a terrace and hillside overlooking the river, are the ruins of the city known today as Yaxchilán, meaning “First Spokesman.” This name was given to the ruins by Lacandón Mayans, who were making pilgrimages there at the time of the first visit by an archaeologist in 1882.

The recorded history of the rulers of Yaxchilán begins in 359 and ends in 808. The city’s greatest period, as measured by the production of its artists, was in the eighth century. The local writers whose work found its way into stone carvings were less laconic than many of their counterparts in other places. In dealing with the limited spaces on slabs of stone designed to fit into buildings, they gave less attention to narrative and more to the poetic dimension of discourse. Their writings sound more like passages from the oral performances of court poets and less like an abstract of the information imparted in such performances.



Instead of using a single emblem to identify the rulers of their city, the writers of Yaxchilán often used a pair of emblems. In the example above, the writer made the part of the royal title that includes the logograph *ch'uh* into a couplet, following it first with *yax* and then with *k'an*. The holder of the title is thus a person who sprinkles (*ch'uh*) offerings of small objects that are green or fresh (*yax*) and yellow or ripe or valuable (*k'an*), the understanding being that the gods will provide an abundance of children, crops, and valuables in return. In depictions of this rite in the art of Yaxchilán, the falling offering becomes an enlarged *ch'uh* sign, interspersed with *yax* and *k'an* signs (figure 18).

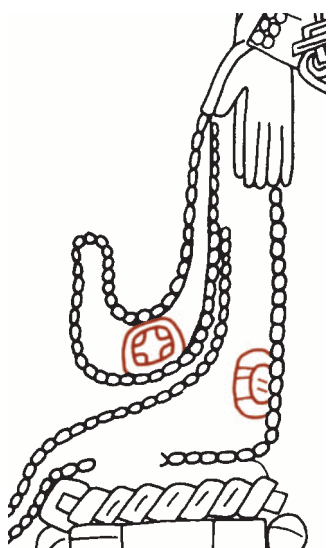


Fig. 18. An offering, outlined with the beads of the *ch'uh* sign, falling from the hands of a lord onto an altar. Enclosed within the beads are the signs for *k'an* (left) and *yax* (right), highlighted in red. From Stela 6 at Yaxchilán. Late Classic.

Yaxchilán writers nearly always rendered the pair of elements that follows the couplet with *aj* first and *po* second, the opposite of the usual order at Palenque, and they nearly always omitted the *-aw* suffix that indicates an *ajaw* reading for these elements. This practice suggests that the primary reading was *ajpo* or *ajpop*, “master of the council,” with *ajaw* or “lord” as an optional addition.

The main sign in the emblem on the left, which first appeared in the eighth century, reads *yej*, which is a term for “mouth” or “teeth” and for the cutting edge of a tool or weapon. The main sign in the other emblem, which was used throughout the history of the city, is composed of parts of two other signs. As we can see, the top part is from the top of the sign for *pax*, and the bottom part is from the bottom of a sign for *chan*:



Pax is the term for an upright, hide-covered drum (as contrasted with a horizontal slit drum) or the sound of such a drum. The branching floral element that spouts from its top represents the sound that emerges from a drum and radiates in all directions. *Chan* could mean “four,” “snake,” or “sky,” but the sign used here is the one for “sky.” Paxchan, then, means something like “Drum Sky” or “Drumming in the Sky.” The notion of filling the sky with the sound of drumming occurs in the dialogue of the K’iche’ Maya dance-drama *Rabinal Achi*, performed to this day in the highland town of Rabinal. One of the characters, in the course of telling the story of his approach to a town where the sacrifice of prisoners of war was in progress, describes the sound of a drum:

It seemed as if the very sky were beating like a heart
the very earth were beating like a heart.

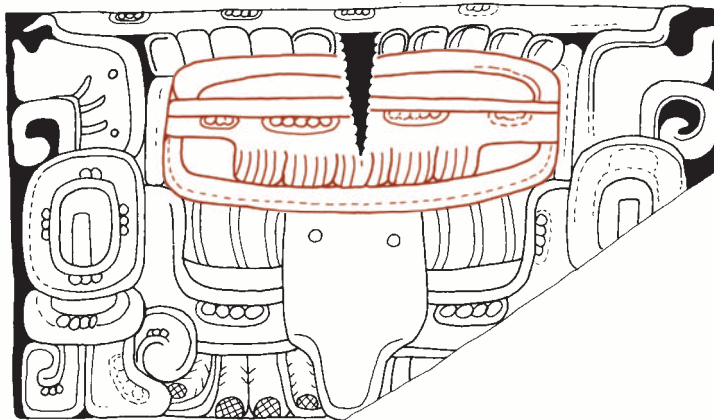


Fig. 19. The face of an earth monster, carved on the base of Stela 4 at Yaxchilán, Chiapas. Paxchan, an ancient name for Yaxchilán and its dynasty, is spelled out on the monster’s forehead, which has a *pa’x*, or “crack” in the middle and is otherwise covered by the sign for *chan*, or “sky” (marked in red). Late Classic.

The earthly reverberations of a drum find expression in the carving on the stelae of Yaxchilán, which show rulers standing on the head of an earth monster that wears an altered version of the Paxchan sign on its forehead. The carving on Stela 4, for example, replaces the floral element that represents the sound of a drum with a crack in the earth, realistically drawn with jagged edges (figure 19). The term for a crack is *paʼx*, making for a sound play on *pax*, the term for an upright drum. The combined visual and verbal effect is to suggest that the sound of the drum not only radiates through the air but penetrates the earth.

Whatever the original connotations of the name Paxchan, it could easily have suggested ceremonies of sacrifice to eighth-century writers and their readers. Many of the inscriptions at Yaxchilán testify to the numerous prisoners of war taken by the local lords of that era. Yej, the name contained in the more recent of the two emblems, could have been understood as a reference to the cutting edge of an instrument of sacrifice. Taken together, the Yej and Paxchan emblems may be interpreted as follows:

lord who makes green offerings for the Council of the Cutting Edge,
lord who makes yellow offerings for the Council of Drum Sky.

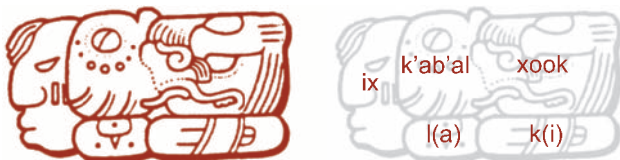
When the local writers used Paxchan as a place-name, apart from a royal title, they sometimes preceded it with a descriptive phrase (at right). *Tan haʼ* means “on the water” or “river,” referring to the Usumacinta. Here we have a glimpse of the ways in which Mayan poets must have sung the praises of their cities. In this case, the words they said or chanted included “the place on the river, / Drum Sky.”



The glory days of Drum Sky began during the reign of a king who was the second in his line to take the name shown at left. The prefix refers to a god whose name is Itzamnaaj, meaning something like “Far Seer” or “True Magician,” and carrying connotations of dignity and the ability to succeed. He was a fatherly god who gave wise counsel and caused flowers to bloom.

Following the name is a logograph for *bʼalam*, “jaguar.” The man named True Magician Jaguar ascended to the throne on October 21, 681. He was destined to rule until he was more than ninety years old, meeting his end on June 17, 742.

True Magician Jaguar had three wives. The woman in the senior position was known mainly by the name shown at right. She



is Ix Kʼabʼal Xook, “Lady Shark Fin,” *xook* being the term for “shark.” Yaxchilán is far from the sea, but the bull shark (*Carcharhinus leucas*) tolerates freshwater and is known to inhabit the Usumacinta. The Shark Fin lineage was that of the lady’s mother.

Map 5. The southwest sky at Yaxchilán, shortly after sunset on October 21, 681. The tree in the Milky Way stands on the horizon, with the stars of Scorpius, seen as a centipede, at its base. Just above Antares, the brightest of those stars, is the planet Venus in its role as the evening star, and to the right is the crescent of the new moon.

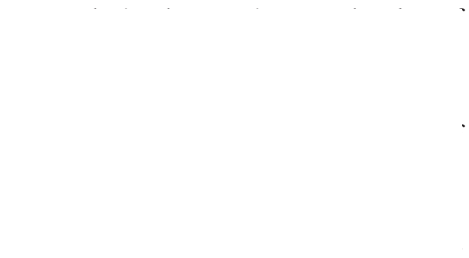
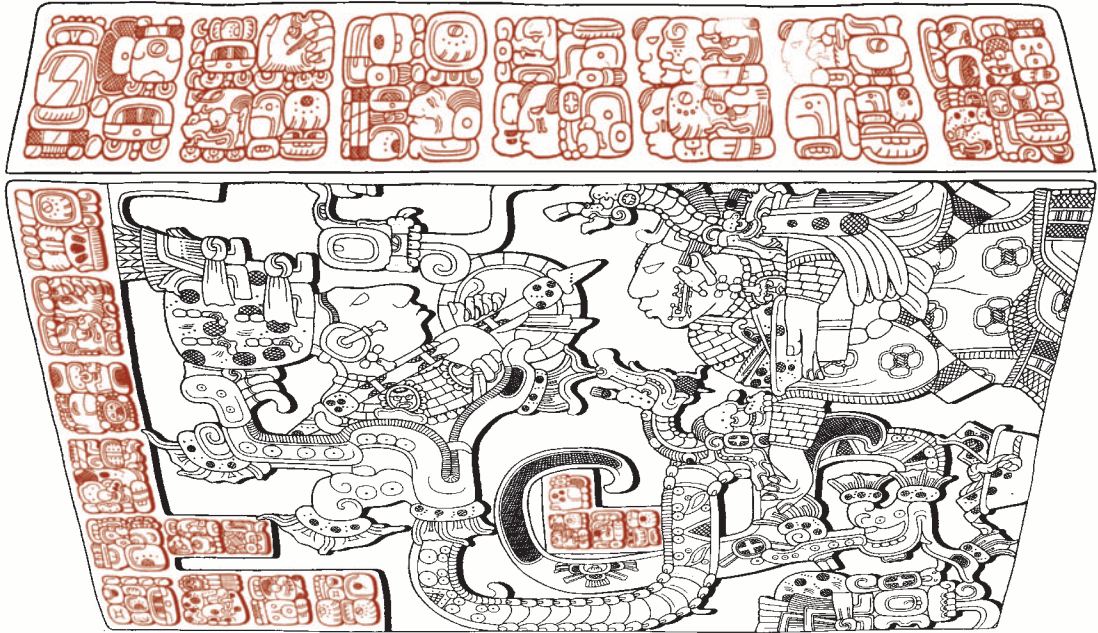


Fig. 20. The underside of Lintel 25 at Yaxchilán, from the palace built for Lady Shark Fin. She is portrayed at lower right, looking up at a vision of a deity who wields the power of the planet Venus. He emerges from the jaws of a draconic centipede corresponding to the stars of Scorpius.



After 0 and 7 score days, 2 single stones, and 2 score stones had passed since she summoned the spirit of the scepter on the long river, at Drum Sky, it was on 3 Ceiba 14 Well that she consecrated her sculpted palace, lady who offers gems, Lady Jaguar Shark, Lady Shark Fin, Lady of the Red Tree, in the plaza on the long river, at Drum Sky, on the lands, in the hollows of the keeper of the kingdom, True Magician Jaguar, lord who offers gems for Drum Sky.



the other lintels of the palace reveal that Lady Shark Fin timed all her séances for occasions when the moon was new, full, or about to cross the Milky Way.

The drawing above shows the same lintel as in figure 20, but from the perspective of a person climbing the stairs toward the doorway that opened beneath it. The inscription on the front edge records the dedication of Lady Shark Fin's palace, which took place on August 3, 723, almost forty-two years after the event in the picture. The moon was in its third quarter at the time of the dedication, about to cross the opposite side of the Milky Way from the one Lady Shark Fin faced on the earlier occasion. Venus was the evening star, currently located near Spica in Virgo. Spica is the principal star in a Mayan constellation occupied by the goddess named in the Dresden Codex as Ix Ajaw Nah, or "Lady of the House." The presence of Venus among her stars would have given her great power and may help explain the timing of the dedication.

The captions for the picture on the underside of the lintel are written from right to left, as if to draw the eye of the reader toward the interior of the palace. The translation that accompanies the drawing on the facing page is written in reverse to match the text. The Thunderbolt (Chaak) mentioned in the upper caption is the planet Venus,

On 5 Ceiba 4 Turtle she summoned the scepter, the weapon
and shield of the flaming, smoking Thunderbolt, with
the blessed lance of the lord who has seen 4 score stones,
Tree Magician
Jaguar, keeper
of the kingdom,
the lord who
makes offerings
for the Cutting
Edge, Pillar of
the World.

The guardian spirit of
the root, the sprout
of the tree, the horse.

of Drum Sky,
tree in the plaza
at the foot of the
makes an offering
Lady Shark Fin

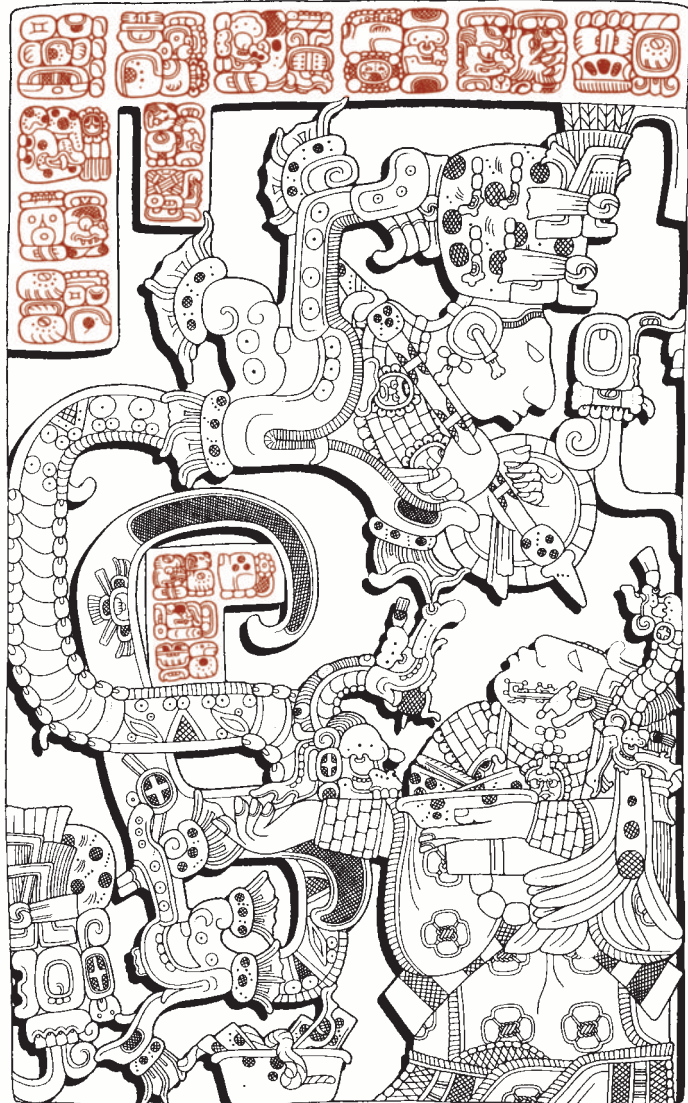




Fig. 21. Lady Shark Fin running a cord studded with thorns through her tongue. The blood on the cord stains the open pages of the book in the basket at her knees, creating a record of her act. Detail from Lintel 24, from a palace door that opens to the left of the door spanned by Lintel 25.

which is the source of the power of the “weapon and shield” in the hands of the deity emerging from the centipede. His armaments are the spiritual counterparts of the material weapon and shield that True Magician Jaguar would have inherited from his predecessors. The “offering” mentioned in the caption in front of Lady Shark Fin is contained in two bowls, one in her hand and the other at her feet. The upper bowl holds an open book with jaguar-skin covers, its pages spattered with blood her hus-



9 The Rattlesnakes of the City of Three Stones

IN THE RAINFOREST of northern Guatemala and southern Yucatán, separated by about seventy miles, are the ruins of the two greatest Mayan cities of the Classic period. The Guatemalan site, known today as Tikal, has become world famous, and its history is well documented in the inscriptions on its monuments. To the north and just across the Mexican border is the less accessible of the two ruins, Calakmul.

The city of Calakmul had two names in its own times, often written side by side as they are here:



The first name reads Uxte Tun, “Three Stones,” suggesting that Calakmul may have claimed a role in the story of the three hearthstones put in place by the gods who created the present world. The second name reads Chiik Naab’, in which *chiik* means “to wave” and *naab’* is the term for “palm of the hand.” The term for “sea” also takes the form *naab’*, but the use of a hand sign in the spelling of *chiik* diverts the reader from that interpretation. The two names together can be translated as “Three Stones, Waving Hand.”

Though the monuments of Three Stones or Waving Hand are more numerous by far than those of any other Classic Mayan city, they are badly eroded and therefore difficult to read. Even so, the influence of the lords of this place was such that their names and deeds were inscribed at numerous other sites, from one end of the Mayan world to the other, where the writing is more legible. The lords’ rise to glory began in 546, and in 562, they defeated the Hair Knot lords of Tikal in battle and took control of that city for a time. But when they attacked the newly independent Tikal in 695, they suffered a defeat that permanently diminished their power. Even so, they may have outlasted the Tikal lords: among the known monuments, the last one at Calakmul was erected in 909, whereas the last one at Tikal dates from 869.

Passages from the early dynastic history of Calakmul survive on a dozen vases whose outer surfaces are painted with texts in double columns. Figure 22 displays the longest of these texts. On this vessel, as on the others, the characters are painted in black and red on a cream-colored slip, bordered above and below by wide red bands edged in black. The overall treatment resembles that of the pages in the surviving

Fig. 22. Late Classic chocolate-drinking vessel from Calakmul. The inscription names some of the city's early ruling lords, in the order of their succession.

Mayan books, and for that reason vessels of this kind are said to be painted in the “codex style.” No books have survived from the Classic period, but the dynastic texts on vases were probably excerpted from longer accounts originally recorded in books. Some events are recounted on more than one vase, but no two vases cover exactly the same series of events. The painters may have made their own editorial choices



when they used material from books, or the books themselves may have varied, or both.

The ruling lords of Calakmul identified themselves with emblems like the one shown below. The main sign is the head of a fanged snake, and the *ka* phonetic comple-



ch'uh ajaw
ka kaan

ment in front of it calls for the Yukatekan term for “snake,” which is *kaan*, rather than Ch'olan *chan*. The emblem as a whole can be translated as “lord who makes offerings for the Snakes.” *Ajaw kaan*, or “lord snake,” is the term for “rat-

tlesnake” in Yukatek, suggesting that the *ajaw* in the emblem has a double meaning, alluding to a particular kind of snake while at the same time designating a royal title. For this reason, and because of the prominence given to the snake's fangs, the name of the dynasty is hereafter translated as “Rattlesnakes.”

The primary subject of the texts on dynastic vases is the succession of Rattlesnake lords. The dates for accession to office appear only in calendar-round form, and only a few of the names have been located in historical time. Some names were used in more than one generation, as in the case of the one at right, from the fifth section of the text on the vase. From other sources we know that a lord identified by this character as Yuknoom Yich'aak K'ahk, or “Shaker Fire Claw,” was born in 649 and took office in 686. The calendar-round date of his accession was 6 Manik' 5 Sip, or “6 Deer 5 Hunter,” but the Shaker Fire Claw of the vase text, who was probably a predecessor of his, took office on 8 Kab'an 5 Xul, or “8 Earth 5 Point.” If such a date called up the same meanings in Classic times that it did in Late



yuknom
yich'aak
k'ahk

Postclassic and early colonial Yucatán, then Kab'an would have associated this lord with woodpeckers and honey, and Xul would have brought his accession close to a time of year when households were visited by comedians. As for the Shaker Fire Claw who appears in the historical record, inscriptions at Tikal name him as the Rattlesnake lord who was defeated by the lord of Tikal in 695, and they note that his successor was chosen by the victorious ruler of Tikal.

The vase text uses characters like the one at right to refer to occasions of royal accession. The hand and the suffix below it read *ch'amam*, “it is taken.” The object taken is designated by the ovoid sign held between the thumb and



forefinger and the pair of curling flames that emanate from it and fill the left side of the character. This object is the *k'awiil*, or “scepter,” we encountered at Palenque, but with two differences: the *-n(i)* affix that calls attention to the ovoid sign as a *nehm*, or “mirror,” is missing, and much greater prominence is given to the flames. For these reasons, the translation I have chosen for the vase text is “fire scepter” rather than “mirror scepter.”

The meaning of the passage that occupies the final five rows of the text is enigmatic. First comes a series of numbers that specify the temporal distance between a prior event, which would normally be one of the events already described, and a later event, which is about to be described. The interval between these events is 37,531 days, falling a little short of 103 years, and it ends on the calendar-round date 2 Ak'b'al 11 Wo, or “2 Night 11 Sign.” However, the prior calendar-round date from which this one was measured would have to be 2 Eb' 15 Tzeek, or “2 Tooth 15 Penance,” which is not among the dates in the preceding text. On the later date, someone “enters the river,” which is to say that someone dies. This person could be one of the lords already mentioned, or it could be the individual for whom the vase was made, whose names appear at the end of the inscription as “Iguana Earth” and something to do with “Blue Water.”

The meaning of the final passage would be somewhat less enigmatic if the vase had been excavated by archaeologists, in which case we would know exactly where and in what context it was found. In any case, the fourth character from the end describes the vase as *yuch'ib*, “his or her drinking vessel,” referring to Iguana Earth. If the person of that name was the one who died, the vessel would have been filled with a chocolate beverage and then placed in the grave.

In the translation that begins on the next page, the words in italics have been supplied to clarify the original text.











10 Drawing and Designing with Words

WHEN THE SIGNS of the Mayan script are locked into a relationship with the sounds of language, the reader converts clusters, rows, and columns of marks back into words, phrases, and sentences, reversing the sequence followed by the writer. At times, the process of decoding a text is slowed down by beautiful calligraphy or an unusual spelling, but the directionality of language is still there, drawing the reader onward. In this chapter, we look at cases in which Mayan writers created graphic art that liberates signs from linguistic directionality, causing them to linger on the threshold between sight and sound. The meanings conveyed by this art are still dependent, in part, on the spatial arrangement of the signs, but considerations other than sentence structure come into play. In the contemporary literary world, such works have analogs in the concrete poetry of Europe, the Americas, and Japan. However, most concrete poets overcome the abstractness of writing by organizing its signs into images and diagrams, whereas many of the signs used by Mayan poets are iconic to begin with. Their work bears some resemblance to that of Japanese concrete poets, whose inventory of signs includes iconic characters of Chinese origin.

Our first example of Mayan concrete poetry is the painting on the outer surface of a Late Classic vase from Alta Verapaz, on the northern edge of the Guatemalan highlands. The cylindrical design field is occupied by just two characters, repeated in rows that run clear around the vase. In a single row just below the rim, the name of the god Nehn K'awiil, or "Mirror Scepter," is repeated seventeen times. In a deliberate play on his name, it is written in mirror image, so that it draws the eye of the reader from right to left. At the same time, it has been redrawn to better fit the rectilinear scheme of the overall design. The character on the left in the illustration below shows a more ordinary way of writing Nehn K'awiil, but it has been reproduced in mirror image so as to facilitate comparison with the character on the vase. The rest of the design field is organized by a textual grid with three rows and sixteen columns, and each cell contains a character that depicts the left-facing head of a leaf-nosed bat and reads *sutz'*,



“bat.” Again, the writer has redesigned the usual character (in red at left) to fit the rectilinear context. A Mayan viewer who was reasonably familiar with iconography but not good at reading texts would have found it easy

[illegible]

BAT BAT BAT BAT BAT BAT BAT BAT

BAT BAT BAT BAT BAT BAT BAT BAT

BAT BAT BAT BAT BAT BAT BAT BAT



MIRROR MIRROR MIRROR MIRROR MIRROR MIRROR MIRROR
SCPTER SCPTER SCPTER SCPTER SCPTER SCPTER SCPTER

© 2018 MIRROR MIRROR MIRROR MIRROR MIRROR MIRROR MIRROR
MIRROR MIRROR MIRROR MIRROR MIRROR MIRROR MIRROR

BAT BAT BAT BAT BAT BAT BAT BAT

BAT BAT BAT BAT BAT BAT BAT BAT

BAT BAT BAT BAT BAT BAT BAT BAT



rendered in the manner of the example shown here in red. Its identifying feature, enclosed in a cartouche, is the profiled head of the divine patron of Lord days, wearing a simple head scarf. The carver treated the cartouche as if it were a window (at right), giving a view of a human lord that shows his upraised right hand, his chest and shoulders, and his necklace, hair knot, and headdress. What was remote and divine has become close and human, and the closed code of writing has been opened to the world.



The logograph for the day named Lord, prefaced with a bar-and-dot number that makes it into the date 11 Lord, stands alone on one side of the vase. This is more than just a divinatory date. In terms of a timekeeping practice that made its first obvious appearance in Late Classic Yucatán, it serves to identify a *k'atun*, or “score of stones,” by specifying the date on which its 7,200 days were completed. The final day name is always Lord, but the number prefix varies. The highest unit of five-place long-count numbers, the bundle of stones lasting 144,000 days, is omitted in this kind of dating. Further, the count of scores of stones tops out at thirteen rather than twenty, because the number coefficients of divinatory days run only as high as thirteen. A complete series of thirteen scores of stones lasts 96,600 days, running about three months longer than 256 solar years. With the completion of such a period, the sequence of day numbers that identifies each of the thirteen scores of stones is repeated. Thus, the task of locating the inscription on the vase in historical time requires a choice among the various scores of stones that ended on 11 Lord.

One way of narrowing the choices is to consider the archaeological dating of Mayan pottery styles. A score of stones ending on 11 Lord began in 514 and ended in 534, but that period is too early for this vessel. The next such score began in 771 and ended in 790, falling within the period when such vessels were made. The next score after that ran too late, beginning in 1027 and ending in 1047. The vessel provides a further clue that permits full historical precision. On the opposite side from the date that identifies the score of stones is a text that begins with the calendar-round date 6 Kawak 2 Sotz', or “6 Thunder 2 Bat.” Such dates recur at fifty-two-year intervals, whereas a score of stones lasts a little less than twenty years. The date 6 Thunder 2 Bat did not occur during the score that ran from 514 to 534, but it did come around during the score that ran from 771 to 790. It fell on the long-count date 9.17.2.3.19 and the Gregorian date March 31, 773. On that day, someone was presented with this drinking vessel.

The five characters that include the calendar-round date form a **T** shape. Following normal reading order, 6 Thunder comes first (on the left arm) and counts as the only character in the first of a pair of columns. Next comes 2 Bat, at the top of a second column consisting of three characters. Next in this column is a verb of presentation that occurs on many drinking vessels, but its precise reading has yet to be worked out. Below it is a clearly written example of *yuch'ib'*, “his or her drinking vessel.” The last char-



11LO
RD

ON 6 THUNDER 2 BAT
THIS DRINKING VESSEL
WAS PRE
SENTED
TO THE
SPROUT

acter in the reading order, forming the right arm of the **T**, identifies the recipient of the vessel as a *ch'ok*, or “sprout,” a young person belonging to the lineage of the donor.

In and of itself, the text that forms the **T** provides no clue to the identity of the sprout beyond the dedication date. But there is a clue in the shape of the **T**, which makes the text into a sort of monogram. The logograph for the day name Ik', or “Wind,” at left in the following illustration, has a **T** shape as its identifying mark:



Further, this day name sometimes takes the form of the second logograph in the illustration, with a **T** on the cheek of the profiled head of the god whose name, Chaak in Yuktatek, can be translated as “Thunderbolt.” In third place is the head of an imperson-

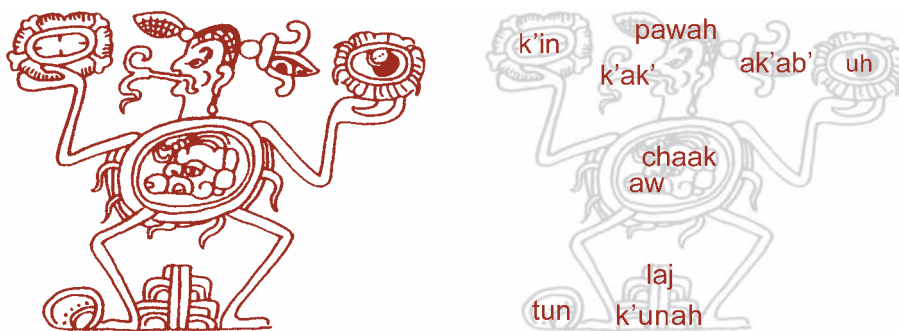


Fig. 23. Painting from a Late Classic bowl. Through a combination of writing and iconography, it records the attributes of the god Pawahtun.

ator of this god, from a carved stone relief at Chichén Itzá in north-central Yucatán. At the city of Uxmal, in northwest Yucatán, Chaak is written in the manner of the logograph at right, with a stylized version of the head that incorporates the **T** above a phonetic complement that reads *k(i)*. The lord who ruled Uxmal in the late ninth and early tenth century, several generations after the creation of the vessel with the **T** sign, bore the name Chan Chaak K'ak'nal Ajaw, “Sky Thunderbolt Fireplace Lord.” It is possible that some of the previous rulers of Uxmal shared the Chaak part of his name, and that the young person who received this vessel became one of them.

Our final example of concrete poetry is painted on a pottery bowl of a type that was made in the lowlands between 550 and 700 (figure 23). In this case, the signs of the text are inserted into the picture rather than the other way around, but they are not organized into a caption. Instead, they label particular objects or take the place of objects that might have been depicted. The figure in the picture is that of the god Pawahtun, whose identity is revealed at the iconographic level by his hairnet, the markings on his face, his spidery arms and legs, and the orb web suggested by the concentric lines around his body. The text also identifies him, though all three of the signs that spell his name are embedded in the iconography. The artist has drawn Pawahtun's hairnet (at left in the illustration below) in a way that suggests a combination of the syllabic signs for *pa* (in the middle) and *wa* (at right):



The sign for *tun*, which means “stone,” is appropriately located at ground level, in front of his right foot.

The responsibilities of Pawahtun are on a cosmic scale. He holds the sun in his right hand, marked with a sign that reads *k'in*, or “sun.” In his left hand is a sign that reads *ja* when it serves as a syllable and *k'al*, or “twenty,” when it is associated with counting, but in the present context, where it is paired with the sun, it means *uh*,



11 Graffiti

MAYANS OF ANCIENT TIMES sometimes did their drawing and writing on surfaces that had not been intended as a medium for graphic expression. Among the surviving works of this kind, the most abundant are inside the rooms of masonry buildings whose walls and vaulted ceilings survive. The plaster that covered the doorjambs, floors, benchtops, walls, and vaults of these rooms is often intact, complete with the scratched lines of ancient graffiti.

The only site that has seen a sustained effort to document graffiti on plastered surfaces is Tikal, in northern Guatemala. It has the longest recorded history of all the



Classic cities in the rainforest, running from 292 to 869. Here (at left) is the emblem of its ruling dynasty. The main sign is an image of hair gathered together and tied with a piece of cloth. It reads Muutal, meaning “that which is gathered in or made smaller,” which in this case is a hair knot. The city had the same name, but

after a member of the Hair Knot dynasty moved away and founded a new city in 629, the name of the original city was written as at right. Yax Muutal means “First (or Original) Hair Knot Place.”



Common among the pictorial graffiti of First Hair Knot Place are animals, monsters, and profiled human faces. Lords in full regalia are subjects as well, some of them carried in palanquins. Also common are diagrams of a board game, always rendered with the same number of squares in the same rectangular arrangement as in the example in figure 24.

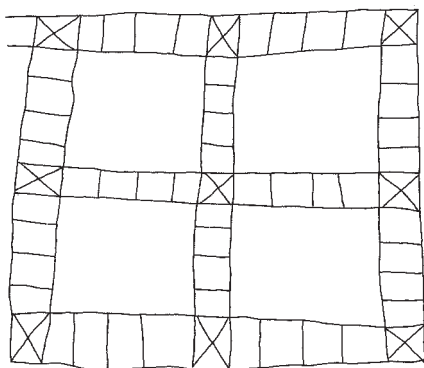


Fig. 24. A game board incised on a plastered wall at Tikal, Guatemala.

Players would have thrown some kind of dice and moved tokens along the pathways. Most diagrams were drawn on horizontal surfaces, but this example was inscribed on a wall, requiring tokens that would stick to the plaster. They were probably made of chicle, a latex that comes from a local rainforest tree, the sapodilla (*Achras zapota*). Chicle is the principal ingredient of today’s chewing gum.

A player starting at one corner of a diagram would have to advance twenty squares

to reach the opposite corner, whether staying on the perimeter or going through the middle, and twenty more to get back home. Indigenous games that require a minimum of forty moves to complete a circuit are found as far north as the Navajo and Pueblo peoples of the southwestern United States. The rules of the Mayan version are not known, but in the northern versions, a player who lands in a place already occupied by an opponent sends the opponent back to the starting place.

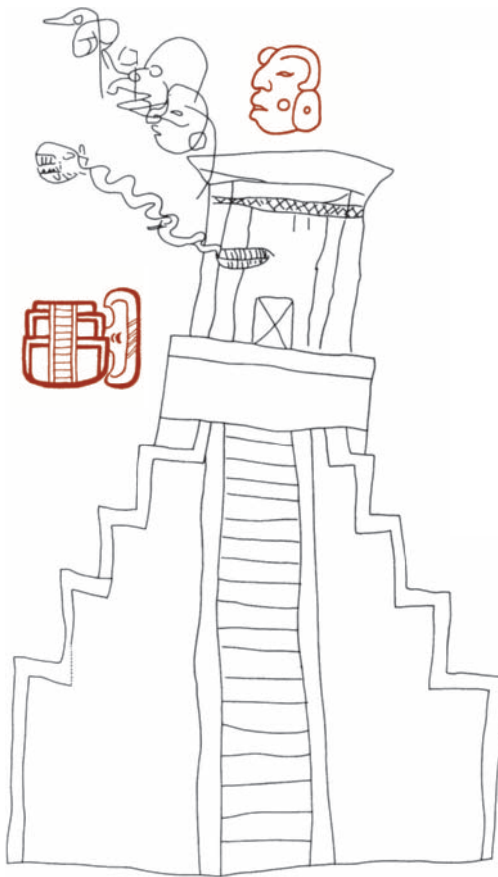


Fig. 25. A pyramid with a temple on top, drawn on a plastered wall at Tikal. Examples of the written signs that probably provided models for parts of the drawing are in red.

Standing on the border between drawing and writing are various depictions of pyramids topped by temples, such as the one in figure 25. The character shown alongside it (in red) refers to a stepped pyramid with a temple on top. The main sign is an image of a pyramid, but the temple is indicated by the logographic suffix to the right, which reads *nah*, meaning “house” or “temple.” In the drawing, the image of the pyramid is similar to the one in the glyph, but the suffix has been dropped in favor of an image of a temple. Rising from the temple are spiritual images whose verbal description would require a lengthy text. Taking flight from the door is a celestial rattlesnake. Above the snake, emanating from the upper left corner of the roof, is a series of images that dramatize a shamanic journey to a higher world. The profiled human head that comes first in the series is a sketchy version of the logograph (shown in red beside it) for *xib'*, “male person.” In the next image, overlap-

ping with the first one but higher and farther from the temple, the same man wears a mask with a prominent beak. Beyond that image, reaching still higher, he appears as a bird in flight.

The textual qualities of the drawing of the pyramid and the still-human profile may offer us a glimpse into the margins of Mayan literacy. The drawing could be the work of a person who was not formally trained as a writer but who had enough knowledge of writing to recognize iconic signs and integrate them into larger images. Further glimpses into the margins are provided by graffiti that consist of freestanding characters. Among these are dynastic emblems, including this sketchy rendition of the Hair

Knot emblem (in black next to the official version). Far more common are isolated day names from the divinatory calendar, sometimes prefaced by bar-and-dot numbers. In figure 26, a formal version of the



logograph for the day name Ajaw, or “Lord,” (in red) is provided for comparison with a version occurring at the upper left edge of a cluster of wall graffiti (in black). The in-

formal version is playful and perhaps irreverent, with the eyes looking upward and a quick touch of naturalism in the drawing of the nose. At bottom center are two more characters, one above the other, that appear to belong together. They are difficult to read, but the top one, prefixed by the single bar of the number 5, may be another rendition of the day name Ajaw.

Dates from the divinatory calendar also occur in the graffiti at the Late Classic site of Comalcalco, on the extreme western edge of the Mayan world in the Mexican state of Tabasco. Much of the construction at this site was done with fired bricks, and many bricks were inscribed by their makers before they were dried and fired. In figure 27, the date 13 Ik', or “13 Wind,” is legible, but the day name is at right angles to its proper position, with the trefoil device ap-



Fig. 26. A cluster of graffiti incised on a plastered wall at Tikal, with characters from the Mayan script that include the logograph for Ajaw. In red at left is a formal example of Ajaw.

pearing to the right of the main sign rather than beneath it (as in the formal version shown in red). This shift could be a mistake by a brick maker with a low level of literacy, but it could also be an expression of the same playfulness we see in the profiled head above the date. This skillfully rendered drawing pushes the style of official art toward caricature. The subject is a reigning lord, probably the lord of Comalcalco.

Nearly all the characters in graffiti are written singly, without any role in a connected text. But in one group of wall graffiti at Tikal, shown in black in figure 28, nearly every item is a character or at least resembles one. The overall visual effect is like that of a two-column inscription, but the space between the columns is unusually wide and the rows are out of line with one another. Four of the characters in the left-hand column, beginning with the second one, are legible despite the sketchy manner in which they are rendered, and they make sense when they are read together.



Fig. 27. A brick from Comalcalco, Tabasco, with graffiti that include a date from the divinatory calendar. In red at left is a formal version of the same date.

The first character in the group of four combines a bar-and-dot 6 with the sign for the day K'an, or "Net," which is missing the suffix that usually appears beneath the formal version (in red at upper left in figure 28). The character below it combines the number 8 with a sketchy rendition of a day sign for Ajaw, or "Lord," resting on an equally sketchy base (again the formal version is in red). The interval from 6 Net to 8 Lord happens to be

236 days, equal to 8 synodic months of 29.5 days each. This number is the length of the period a table in the Dresden Codex assigns to the planet Venus in its role as the morning star. Moreover, the first of the five types of morning star described in the table always begins its term on a day named Net and ends it on a day named Lord, with variable number prefixes.

The third and fourth characters in the group confirm the astronomical significance of the first two. The third one is an abbreviated version of a character whose formal version (in red) has falling droplets of blood on both sides, a star sign on top, and a spiral sign for the syllable *yi* under the star



Fig. 28. Two columns of writing on a plastered wall at Tikal. In the left column are four characters that form a coherent text, laying out a time window for a possible attack on the town of Itzan. In red at far left is a formal version of the text.

Whatever the story behind the four characters that suggest an attack on Itzan, the fact that they form the outlines of a coherent text sets them apart from the other characters that appear in the graffiti of Tikal. They are also remarkable for their lively lines, rendered rapidly but gracefully. Clearly, they are the work of someone with more than a casual knowledge of writing. Perhaps the writer planned to make a formal proposal on a later occasion. Among all the texts in the Mayan script, this one is the closest thing to a rough draft.

In at least one interior space in the Mayan world, nearly all the marks on the available surfaces were the work of individuals who were skilled at writing and drawing. The space is an extensive limestone cave that was a major pilgrimage site during Classic and Postclassic times. It is located in the Maya Mountains, which rise along the south-east edge of the southern lowlands and are divided by the boundary between Guatemala and Belize. When the cave came to the attention of archaeologists in 1980, they gave it the name Naj Tunich, meaning “Stone House” in Mopan, the Mayan language spoken in the area. But its original names, as stated in a number of the texts painted on its walls, are as shown at right. Mo’ Pan means “Macaw Cavern” in Mopan and other Yucatekan languages, and this could be the place that gave the Mopan Mayans their name. Mam Na means “Grandfather House,” which suggests that the cavern is an abode of ancestors.



Macaw Cavern may have received its name because macaws once nested near the entrance, or the name may have seemed appropriate because the cavern’s main passage runs northward from the entrance, toward the realm of a deity whose name is K’inich K’ak’ Mo’, or “Sun-Eyed Fire Macaw,” in Yucatek and Wuqub’ Kaqix, or “Seven Macaw,” in K’iche’. This god once claimed to be the sun, but his pride led to his downfall. According to the Popol Vuh, twin heroes shot him out of his tree and he fell into the earth. The seven stars of the Big Dipper, which remain as his sign, reach their high point above the North Star and their low point in the underworld beneath it, disappearing below the horizon. The twins continue their adventures by entering a cave that gives them access to the underworld, where they eventually find the graves of their twin fathers and establish the custom of honoring the dead.

There are a few tight places in the tunnel system of Macaw Cavern, but the main passage averages fifteen yards wide and has a very high ceiling. The pictures and texts on the walls occur in widely separated clusters, each one near deposits of charcoal left behind by fires that consumed offerings and provided light. Many of the texts include dates, mostly of the calendar-round kind. These dates are hard to anchor in historical time, but there are two long-count dates: 9.13.0.0.0 and 9.17.0.0.0, falling in 692 and 771. The calendar-round dates reveal that some of the authors of the texts must have come from outside the world of lowland Mayans. Eleven of these dates follow the standard lowland system for matching the named and numbered days of the 365-day

On 11 Snake

18 Penance,

the ones who visited

Macaw Cavern,

Grandfather House

were Celestial

Turtles,

Flintstone Lords,

the ones who stand firm,

actors,

companions:

Constant Dreamer,

a diviner,

Turtle,

Flintstone Lord,

sage,

sprout,

and his companion,



8 Heaps of Corn,

Turtle,

Sprout Lord,

Flintstone

Lord

who stands firm,

an actor.

year to those of the 260-day divinatory calendar, but six other dates follow a system specific to the Guatemalan highlands. The numbers and names of the highland dates are written with logographs that could have stood for different words in different languages. Many of the signs in the passages that follow these dates are difficult to reconcile with standard lowland forms. Perhaps the authors of such passages were writing in a language that was neither Ch'olan nor Yukatekan and were using a version of the Mayan writing system specific to the Guatemalan highlands.

Again and again, visitors who wrote on the walls of the cavern treated them as a sort of guest book in which they registered their presence. One of them, calling himself Wayasmal, or "Constant Dreamer," authored three texts, one of which consists solely of his name and titles. He prefaced the other two texts with calendar-round dates for his visits that follow the standard lowland system: 12 K'an 2 Muwan, or "12 Net 2 Hawk," and 11 Chikchan 18 Tzeek, or "11 Snake 18 Penance." The corresponding long-count dates have been reconstructed as 9.16.3.10.4, falling on November 11, 754, and 9.16.4.1.5, falling on May 11, 755. On the later occasion, he entered the cave with a companion whose name, 8 B'a Nal, or "8 Heaps of Corn," he added to his own. His description of this person follows the same general lines as his description of himself. Each of them is a member of a lineage or clan named Aak, or "Turtle," and each is a *ch'ok*, or "sprout," a young heir to a royal position. Already they both hold the title of Tok' Tuun Ajaw, "Flintstone Lord," perhaps referring to their status as warriors. Finally, each of them "stands firm" as a *b'akab'*, which is a Yukatek term for an "actor"

or "impersonator." This term serves as the name of four divinities who held up the sky at the four corners of the world and were themselves actors. Perhaps the two pilgrims had impersonated these gods in a ritual drama.

For a translation of the full record of the visit of Constant Dreamer and 8 Heaps of Corn to Macaw Cavern, see the opposite page. The text is in single columns, with characters running all the way down the first column before the second column comes into play.

The spiritual presences in Macaw Cavern are revealed not by the words the pilgrims wrote but by the pictures they drew. Near the end of the main passage is a drawing of the hero twins, speaking and gesturing in conversation (figure 29). The young man



Fig. 29. A drawing on the wall of the Naj Tunich cave, in Guatemala, showing a lively discussion between the Mayan hero twins. On the left, with spots on his body, is One Lord, or One Blowgunner; on the right, with patches of jaguar skin on his body, is First Jaguar, or Little Jaguar Sun.

Fig. 30. A drawing on the wall of the Naj Tunich cave, showing One Lord, or One Blowgunner, dressed as a ballplayer. His brother's absence, together with the number 9 above the ball rolling down the side of the court, suggest that the ball is the head of his brother.



on the left, whose identity is revealed by the black spots on his face and body, would have been known to the cave's lowland visitors as Jun Ajaw, or "One Lord," whereas highland visitors would have known him as Junajpu, or "One Blowgunner." The one on the right, identified by the patches of jaguar skin on his body, was known as Yax B'alam, or "First Jaguar," in the lowlands and Xb'alanq'e, or "Little Jaguar Sun," in the highlands. The cavern must have enjoyed a reputation as the place (or one of the places) where the twins entered or emerged from the underworld in the course of their adventures. Not far beyond their picture is a pit with a vertical drop of at least one hundred eighty yards (the bottom has yet to be found).

In a side passage that branches off to the west of the main passage, a pilgrim who used the highland system for reckoning calendar-round dates drew two pictures. One is a scene from an underworld episode in the story of the twins, featuring One Lord, or One Blowgunner (figure 30). He is identifiable from the black spots on his cheek and his straw hat. This is the same hat he would wear if he were taking a shot at a macaw in a tree, but here he wears it in his role as a ballplayer, playing a game against the Lords of Death. The ball is bouncing off the terraced side of a ball court, and he is ready to receive and return it with the padded device he wears around his midsection. Normally he would play alongside his brother, but in this game, his brother's head is temporarily serving as the ball, as is revealed by the bar-and-dot number 9 above it. *B'olon* is the word for "nine," but the number glyph can also be read

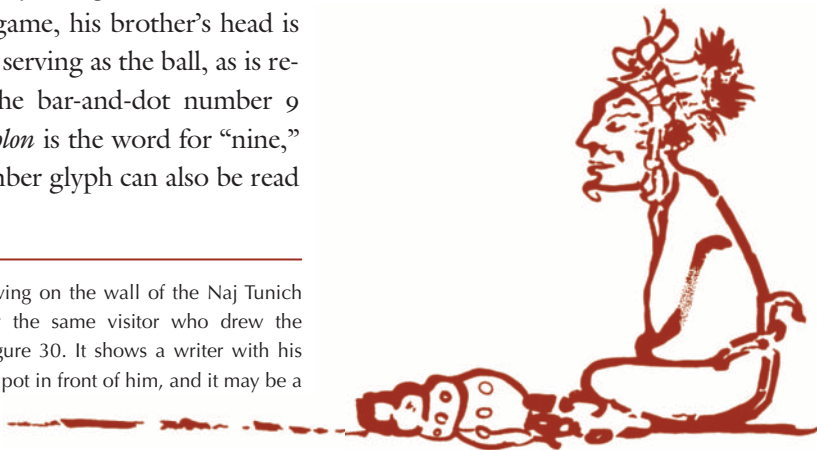


Fig. 31. A drawing on the wall of the Naj Tunich cave, made by the same visitor who drew the ballplayer in figure 30. It shows a writer with his conch-shell ink pot in front of him, and it may be a self-portrait.



12 The Question of the Beginning and End of Time

FAR TO THE NORTH of Tikal and Calakmul, in the northeastern part of the Yucatán peninsula, are the ruins of a large city that has always been known by its original name, right down to the maps and guidebooks of the present day. The name appears in print as Cobá, from Yukatek Maya Koba', meaning "Gray Waters." The city was built around five small, shallow lakes. Today the area in and around the lakes and ruins is wooded, not as densely as the rainforest to the south but more so than the drier thorn forest to the north. On the Caribbean coast to the east, at a distance of about twenty-five miles, are several lagoons that once served as ports for Mayan seagoing canoes.

The recorded history of Cobá, so far as it is presently known, begins in the Late Classic period, in 623. For a time, it was the largest city in northern Yucatán, remarkable for the wide, straight roads, still visible, that reached out in five directions from its center. The roadbeds, paved with cement, were raised above ground level and rested on fill held in by stone retaining walls. Two of the roads ran straight across the lakes that lay in their paths. The authors of the Popol Vuh mention a road of this kind, describing their ancestors as having returned from a pilgrimage to a great city by crossing a body of water on *cholochnik ab'aj*, *bogotajinaq sanayeb'*, "courses of stone, piled up gravel."

The longest of the Cobá roads runs sixty miles westward to the site of Yaxuná, which was ruled by Cobá from the seventh to the tenth century. But in the ninth century, a short distance north of Yaxuná, the city of Chichén Itzá began rising in prominence, and by 950, it had taken control of Yaxuná. Cobá went into a decline after 1000 and had hit bottom by the end of the twelfth century. Chichén Itzá was abandoned by the end of the thirteenth century, but Cobá underwent a renewal in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and its final abandonment did not occur until shortly before the Spanish invasion. Today, at a small hearth in the rubble at the foot of the pyramid now known as La Iglesia, local Mayans burn candles and copal incense.

Cobá has numerous stelas, including three that record the placement of the three hearthstones on 4 Lord 8 Kiln, at the end of the era preceding the present one. But these inscriptions, instead of limiting the long-count date of that event to a five-place number, as at Quiriguá, carry it out to twenty-four places, creating the longest of all long-count dates. For the full sequence, see the passage from Stela 1 on page 132. It gives names to each of the twenty-four periods, but the erosion of the stone surface obscures the names for the highest periods. Where the characters are at least partially legible, they combine the words for bundle (*pib*) or stone (*tun*) with modifiers. The term for the seventh place from the bottom of the number can be read as *tzutz pib*, "ended



13 . . . ,

13 . . . stones, 13 . . . bundles,

13 . . . , 13 . . . ,

13 . . . bundles, 13 . . . bundles,

13 . . . , 13 . . . ,

13 . . . stones, 13 . . . stones,

13 . . . stones, 13 . . . stones,

13 . . . stones, 13 . . . stones,

13 . . . stones, . . . 13 lord stones,

13 ended bundles, 13 higher bundles,

13 bundles, no scores of stones,

no single stones, no scores of days,

no single days, on 4 Lord;

the ninth lord of the night wore the headband,

and 3 days ago the moon had arrived,

. . . is the name of the new

month of a score and 9 days; it was on 8 Kiln

Yellow Sun, which comes in fourteenth place. The sun will be in the middle of the part of the Milky Way that passes by Scorpius, at the base of the giant tree. The hearthstone stars of Orion, instead of rising at midnight and reaching the middle of the sky at dawn, as they did (in theory) at the end of the previous count of thirteen bundles, will rise at dusk and reach the meridian at midnight.

In the alphabetic Chilam Balam books of Yucatán, the stars that reach the meridian shortly before sunrise announce the character of a new era. In the present case, these stars will be Spica and others in or near Virgo, where the goddess Ix Ajaw Nah, or “Lady of the House,” has her home. The Dresden Codex shows her seated on a throne in the sky, receiving offerings (figure 32).

The stars of Virgo correspond to one of the thirteen signs of the Mayan zodiac. They have been the location of the autumnal equinox throughout Mayan history, which probably accounts for the fact that Lady of the House is called *ix k'in sutnal*, “she of the sun’s place of return” or “coming around,” in the Ritual of the Bacabs, an alphabetic book from Yucatán. Autumn is a dry time there, but she is also called “Lady of the Well,” “she who sits in the mud,” and “she who emerges from the sand,” and her



Fig. 33. The spirit familiar of Lady of the House in the form of a frog in the Paris Codex (left) and Madrid Codex (right). The Paris frog swallows the sun, signifying that the sun has entered the part of the sky occupied by stars corresponding to Virgo. The Madrid frog brings rain at the opposite season, when the same stars are visible all night.



Fig. 32. Lady of the House, seated on her throne and receiving offerings. The geometric designs on her dais mark it as the vault of the sky. From the Dresden Codex.

spirit familiar, as pictured in the Paris and Madrid codices, is a frog (figure 33). The Paris Codex shows the frog taking the sun in its upraised mouth, meaning that the sun has entered the place where the lady resides and autumn is arriving. But the Madrid Codex shows the frog head down, bringing rain. To understand this seeming contradiction, we must think of Lady of the House at the time of the vernal equinox, when her stars are visible all night instead of being rendered invisible by the sun. That would be in March, about a month before the first



13 The Mouth of the Well of the Itza

THE SAME PERIOD that saw the decline and eventual abandonment of many of the cities and towns at the center of the Mayan region brought growth, prosperity, and innovation to the north. This contrast creates a problem for archaeologists, who have a tradition of dividing time into stratified periods that can be contrasted in general terms. For many years, specialists in the Mayan field defined the Late Classic period as running from 600 to 900, followed by an Early Postclassic period, running from 900 to 1200. More recently, they have cut the Late Classic short at 800 and followed it with a Terminal Classic period that runs past 900. The end date depends on whether the focus is on the period of decline in the central area or on the new developments that were meanwhile under way in the north. Those who desire to extend the notion of the “Classic” era only far enough to cover the last monuments that celebrate dynasties within the framework of the long count need only push the Terminal Classic a little beyond the former end of the Late Classic, to 925. Those who desire to bring the grandest material remains in the north under the Classic umbrella need to reach as far as 1100 or even later.

At the center of this problem is one of the most powerful and cosmopolitan Mayan cities in all of history. According to archaeologists, the city was founded around 750 and enjoyed its glory days from 850 to 1250. It was built not in the rainforest but in the comparatively arid thorn forest of north-central Yucatán. The Chilam Balam books give it two names: Wuk Yab’nal, “Place of Seven Bushes,” and Chichén Itzá (more properly Chi’ch’e’n Itza), meaning “Mouth of the Well of the Itza.” The well in question is a round, sheer-sided sinkhole in the local limestone bedrock, with a pool at the bottom. It was probably a destination for pilgrims before the city was built, and it was still a pilgrimage site when Fray Diego de Landa visited the ruins of the city in the middle of the sixteenth century.

The founders of the city at the well were the Itzas, speakers of a Yukatekan language who came from somewhere in the rainforest to the south. At their new city, they formed alliances with their northern neighbors and other peoples whose homeland was in Tabasco, on the southern coast of the Gulf of Mexico. The coastal peoples were the Chontals, the westernmost speakers of a Mayan language, and their neighbors, the easternmost speakers of Nahuatl, the principal language of the central Mexican highlands. Among the Chontals and their neighbors were merchants who traveled in large canoes, following routes along the coast and, where possible, on rivers. The rulers of Chichén Itzá doubtless had the cooperation of these merchants when they established

these later pilgrims presented themselves to a lord with the Nahuatl name Nacxit, which is one of the titles taken by Itza lords. The Popol Vuh account states that the pilgrims brought back emblems of lordship with foreign names such as *k'us b'us*, which means “gourd of tobacco” in Yukatek, and *makutax*, from Nahuatl *macuetlaxtli*, meaning “armband.” The combination of Yukatek and Nahuatl terms points to Chichén Itzá as the source of the emblems.

Mayan and Mexican deities coexisted in the pantheon of Chichén Itzá. Prominent among the indigenous deities was Chaak, a bringer of rain whose Yukatekan name came to mean “Thunderbolt” or “Thunderstorm.” The principal Mexican deity, who took the form of a celestial dragon, was known as K'uk'ulkaan, a Yukatekan name in which *k'uk'* is “quetzal,” *k'uk'ul* means “plumed,” and *kaan* is “serpent.” This name is a direct translation of Quetzalcoatl, the Nahuatl name for the same deity. In his draconic aspect, he had enjoyed a previous era of international prominence that coincided with the glory days of Teotihuacan, when the Mayans of the rainforest knew him by the Ch'olan name Waxaklajun Ub'ah Chan, “Serpent of Eighteen Bodies.”

One of the main subjects of the inscriptions of Chichén Itzá is the dedication of temples. The example on pages 143–43 is from a stone lintel over one of the four doorways of the building now known as the Temple of the Four Lintels, located at the southern end of the city's main north-south roadway. The text opens with a calendar-round date, 9 Lamat 11 Yax, or “9 Sunk 11 Green,” and then goes on to state that this date fell within the thirteenth stone of a score of stones that ended on 1 Ajaw, or “1 Lord.” The long-count equivalent is 10.2.12.1.8, corresponding to July 11, 881.

The primary language of the writers of Chichén Itzá was Yukatekan, but the inventory of signs available to them had been developed for the writing of a Ch'olan language. In theory, they could have avoided some of the problems arising from language differences by using as many logographs as possible, omitting phonetic complements so as to leave the question of pronunciation open. In practice, however, they used syllabic signs more often than their Ch'olan counterparts, as if they wished to make the differences clear. A case in point is the word for “fire,” which is *k'ahk* in Ch'olan and *k'ak'* in Yukatekan. The available logograph (at right) is an image of a two-tongued flame that can also serve as a sign for the syllable *k'a*. The writer of the present text chose alternative spellings that eliminate the Ch'olan pronunciation of the word for “fire” in favor of the Yukatekan one:



The first spelling retains the two-tongued flame but uses it as the second of two signs for the syllable *k'a*. In the second spelling, the nonflame sign for *k'a* is written twice. Either spelling results in *k'ak'*, which is unmistakably Yukatekan.

Another example of the desire for phonetic clarity is the treatment of the word for “snake,” which is *chan* in Ch’olan and *kan* in Yukatekan. The most obvious logographic choice is the profiled head of a snake (at right). But the writer preferred the following syllabic spellings, both of which explicitly eliminate *chan* in favor of *kan*:



There was no need to invent new spellings of *ajaw*, or “lord,” because this word has the same form in Ch’olan, Yukatekan, and other Mayan languages. Our writer used two of the available logographs but could not resist providing the reader with additional tips on pronunciation. One of these logographs is the profiled head of the god Jun Ajaw, or “One Lord,” and stands for the day Ajaw. In the Late Classic example, at left in the illustration below, the trefoil below the head is a semantic determinative, confirming that the intended meaning is temporal in nature. The writer wrote the day name (on the right) by simplifying the head, adding a logographic prefix, and substituting a syllabic suffix for the semantic sign:



Ch’olan texts use the prefixed pair of signs that reads *ajaw* and the suffixed phonetic complement for *-aw* when the reference is to a human lord rather than the day named Lord, and they place these signs above and below the name of a dynasty. By using these signs in the spelling of the day name, our Yukatekan writer has moved them outside the domain of dynastic politics and generalized their relationship to the *ajaw* sound combination.

In this next spelling of *ajaw*, as in the first one, the main sign comes from a logograph for the day name (at left) and is sandwiched between affixes for *ajaw* and *-aw*:



But this time the reference is not to a day but to persons who claim *ajaw* as a title. In other words, the writer has removed the day sign from the domain of time and made it into a general sign for *ajaw*. In yet another spelling, again referring to a titled person, the writer resorts to a purely syllabic spelling of *ajaw*:



The varied spellings of *k'ak'*, *kan*, and *ajaw* bespeak a writer who saw the richness of the available stock of signs as an invitation to try out new combinations. Further, the frequent use of syllabic signs and the construction of characters that say the same thing in more than one way are reader friendly. For the Yucatekan reader, dealing with a text laden with Ch'olan logographs might have been something like the problem facing present-day Japanese readers who encounter borrowed Chinese characters in a text otherwise composed of syllabic signs.

The inscription mentions names that also turn up in the Chilam Balam books and other alphabetic texts that were written in Yucatán. It states that the Temple of the Four Lintels is the house of a group of gods called the B'olon ti K'u Ajawob', "Nine Temple Lords," and B'olon ti Kab' Ajawob', "Nine Earth Lords." In the alphabetic literature, these are the gods of the nine levels of the earth, who have celestial counterparts pertaining to the thirteen levels of the sky.

The name of the man who renovated the temple, unveiled the lintels, and officially opened the doors is Yax Pech Kan Ajaw, or "First Tick Snake Lord." Pech and Kan (Can in colonial spelling) are family names that continue among the present-day people of Yucatán. The inscription describes First Tick Snake Lord as the "only one who is lord and owner" of the K'ak' Upakal K'awiil, or "Fire Shield and Scepter," which probably means that he ranked first among the various lords who ruled Chichén Itzá. The Chilam Balam books mention an Itza lord who took K'ak' Upakal as his name.

The writer further describes First Tick Snake Lord by repeating one of the *ajaw* characters discussed earlier but inserting the image of a bone awl into the region of the nose of the profiled head, as shown at right. The awl seems to indicate that the septum of this lord had been pierced for the insertion of an ornament. Only a warrior of noble descent who had taken a prisoner enjoyed this privilege. Most of the men depicted in the relief sculpture of Chichén Itzá wear nose ornaments, and the authors of the Annals of the Kaqchikels state that Kaqchikel pilgrims had their noses pierced during their visit to the city.



At the end of the half of the inscription that deals with First Tick Snake Lord, he is further described as the lord and keeper of something named by the logograph at right. Except for the round sign at the lower right corner, this logograph refers to a ball court, though the corresponding Yucatekan word is not yet known. The image consists of a crosssection through one side of a ball court, complete with a ball rolling down a stepped incline and a pole that marks the playing field. The sign at lower right, whose Yucatekan reading is *b'e*, could be a phonetic complement belonging to the



unknown term for ball court, but it could also be the word for “road.” The road whose southern end is at the Temple of the Four Lintels has its northern end at one of the city’s ball courts, and for this reason I translate the character as a whole as “Ball Court Road.”

The second half of the inscription names two other lords who joined First Tick Snake Lord at the opening of the temple, one of them a “Sun Priest” and the other bearing a title that may read K’ul Ajsajil, “Master of Great Fear.” Both of them are “Lords over the Earth” and “Lords of Fire,” and both are described as the bearers of death-dealing axes. They may have been priests whose functions included the beheading of prisoners of war.

The writer arranged the characters in sixteen groups of four each, illustrated and translated on pages 143–44.

At the end of the twelfth century, a group of lords from Chichén Itzá founded a new city fifty miles to the west. It was Mayapán, whose name combines Maya’, the Yucatek name for the land of the Yucatán peninsula, with *pan*, meaning “banner.” A stela at the site commemorates the completion of a score of stones on 10 Lord, which would have happened in 1185, but the Chilam Balam books say the city was founded during the following score of stones, which ended in 1204. In the new city, as in the older one, government took the form of *multepal*, or “shared rule,” but with one feature that may have been new: the lords from towns outside Mayapán were required to live in the city. The houses were packed more tightly together than at Chichén Itzá, and the entire city was surrounded by a wall.

Mayapán attacked Chichén Itzá during the score of stones that ended in 1204, forcing some of the Itzas who still lived in that city to leave. The exiles went southward into the rainforest of northern Guatemala, to the area around the lake known today as Petén Itzá. Whether they reoccupied ancestral towns, or rejoined Itzas who had never gone north, or founded new towns, there was an Itza presence in the area at the time of the Spanish invasion. Those who remained at Chichén Itzá after the attack managed to retaliate against Mayapán during the score that ended in 1244, but the balance of power in northern Yucatán was shifting toward the newer city.

A group of Itzas returned from the rainforest and settled in Mayapán during the score of stones that ended in 1263, and another group arrived from Chichén Itzá during the next score, bringing Nahuatl-speaking mercenaries with them. The name of a lordly family in the later group first appeared in the inscriptions of Chichén Itzá, written with syllabic signs. In the building known today as Akab Tzib, in an area between the northern and southern districts of the city, their name is written as at right. Kokom (Cocom in colonial spelling), meaning “one who listens with attention,” continues today as a surname in Yucatán.



In Mayapán, the Cocoms took over the dominant role, replacing many of the earlier buildings with new ones modeled on those of Chichén Itzá. Their principal rivals among the lordly families of Mayapán bore the name Xiw (Xiu in colonial spelling).



It came on the day Nine Sunk

11 Green, during

the 13th stone of 1 Lord:

the unveiling, the initiation

of the lintel of the house

and the doorway of the home

of the 9 Temple Lords.

First Tick Snake

Lord is the name

of the one who opened the door, the renovator,

the manly one, the only one

who is lord and owner

of the Fire Shield and Scepter,

a pierced lord, a penitent,

a maker of fire, Lord of

Ball Court Road, the one who keeps it in order.



Present on 11 Green

for the unveiling, the initiation

of the lintel of the house,

the capstone of the home

of the Lords of the 9 Levels of the Earth

were First Tick Snake

and the Lords over the Earth

as they are called, standing there:

the Sun Priest who hastens death,

who cuts with an ax,

a Lord of Fire,

in the company of the Master of Great Fear,

Lord of the Blade,

also a Lord of Fire,

who has his own

ax, as a Lord over the Earth.



14 Writing on the Pages of Books

FOR THE PERIOD of Mayan literary history that runs from 400 B.C.E. to the thirteenth century, the only texts that survive were painted or carved on pottery, stucco, stone, bone, shell, or rot-resistant wood. It is likely that more writing was done on paper than on any other surface, but what little remains is unreadable. At several Classic sites the disintegrated remains of books have been found in tombs, having been placed on the chests or next to the heads of their deceased owners. The four books that survive in legible condition date from more recent times. The earliest one is the Grolier Codex, from central Chiapas. Its radiocarbon date is 1230 ± 130 years, and it contains an almanac for the planet Venus that would have been in effect during that time. It was left as an offering in a dry cave, so that ten of its pages were partially preserved. Because the text is limited to dates from the divinatory calendar and interval numbers, the language of its writer is not known.

The other three books, named for the European cities in which they ended up, date from still later times. The Dresden Codex was written in the fifteenth century but was based, in part, on earlier texts. It may have been collected as early as 1519, when Cortés and his men landed on the island of Cozumel. They reported finding books in houses whose residents had fled at the news of their approach, and Cortés included at least one Mayan book in his first shipment of treasure from the New World. The Madrid Codex has been traced to the area of Chancénote, in northeastern Yucatán. In 1607, it was confiscated by a missionary, who took it to Spain in 1618. It was probably written shortly before or shortly after the Spanish invasion, as was the Paris Codex. The texts in these three books combine Yukatekan and Ch'olan features. Like the inscriptions at Chichén Itzá, they have a higher proportion of syllabic signs than the Ch'olan inscriptions of the cities farther south.

All Mayan languages have a term for “paper,” and in all cases it can also mean “book.” In Ch'olan languages, the term is presently *hun* and once took the form *huun*, and in Yukatekan languages, it is *hu'un* or *hu'um*. Tzeltalan languages have *hun* (in Tzeltal itself) and *wun* (in Tzotzil). The K'ichean terms are *ju* (in Q'eqchi'), *huuj* (in Poqomchi'), and *muj* (in the rest). The paper of the surviving books was made from the inner bark of a tree of the fig family (*Ficus cotinifolia*). This kind of paper was widely manufactured in ancient Mesoamerica, and it is still produced in a number of indigenous communities in central Mexico.

Mayans made paper by soaking the bark fibers in a solution of lime and then beating them into thin sheets. Next they felted or glued two sheets together, one on top of



Fig. 36. A writer with a reed pen in his right hand and a conch-shell ink pot in his left. Below his pen is a stack of paper. Detail from a painting on a Late Classic chocolate-drinking vessel.

and a writing instrument in his right. Two kinds of instruments were used: a reed pen with a bunch of hair inserted in the tip or tied to it and a quill pen that was normally stripped of its barbs. Quill pens are usually depicted as curved, so the instrument in figure 36 is probably a reed pen.



The first and last pages of a book were glued to thin boards that served as covers. In Classic depictions of bound books, the boards are covered with jaguar skin or painted with jaguar spots. The logograph for “book,” whose Ch’olan reading was presumably *hun*, is a schematic representation of a book of this kind (at left). This is a closed book seen on edge, with jaguar-skin covers above and below and paper pages in the middle. The covers signify that books contained the knowledge of priest-shamans who counted jaguars among their guardian spirits. At the same time, the jaguar spots, as symbols of the stars, suggest that some Classic books were like the surviving ones in containing astronomical information.

Some paintings on ceramic vessels show a writer at work on a book that already has its covers attached. In such cases, the writer is always shown in profile, but the book is turned toward the viewer, as if the writer were both working on it and pre-



Fig. 37. A writer holding an open book in one hand while writing in it with the other. The artist has turned the book toward the viewer. Detail from a painting on a Late Classic chocolate-drinking vessel.

senting it to the viewer. In figure 37, the book is tilted away from the viewer just far enough to show the covers, with the top one folded out of the way to the left and the bottom one resting on the left hand of the writer. With his right hand, he applies a curved quill pen to an open page in the middle of the book. The edges of blank pages are visible beneath this one, and the edges of finished pages can be seen to the left, as if the viewer (rather than the writer) had put them aside while leafing through the book from left to right. Except for two pages in the Paris Codex, the same left-to-right reading order is followed in all the pages of the surviving books.

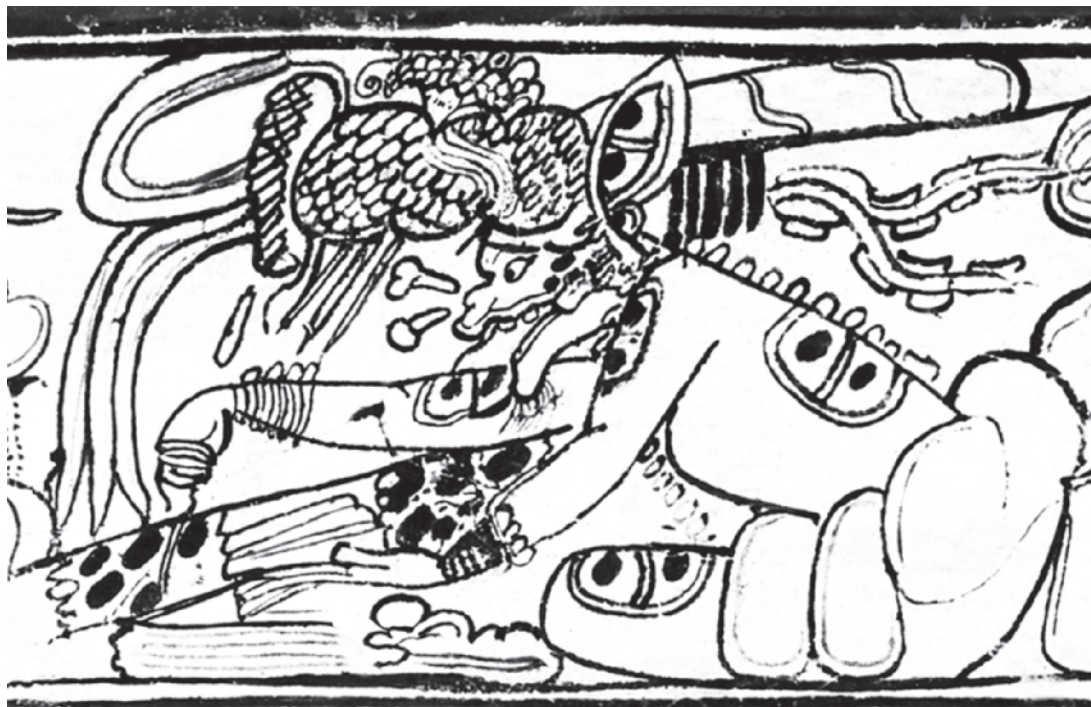
Some interpreters of images like the one in figure 37 see the writer and the book as belonging to the same perspective, which would mean that the pages of Classic books, unlike those of later books, opened from bottom to top, like a calendar, rather than sideways. But this interpretation is contradicted by a Late Classic clay figurine from the island of Jaina, off the west coast of Yucatán. The figure is a seated woman with her right hand resting on the closed book she holds in her lap (figure 38). The folds that connect the pages, visible above her knee, indicate that this book would have opened sideways rather than from bottom to top.

Some vase paintings show twin monkeys, the divine patrons of writing, holding books in front of them. In figure 39, closed books are piled up beneath the



Fig. 38. A woman resting her hand on the screen-folded book she holds on her lap. Detail of Late Classic clay figurine from Jaina, in Campeche.

Fig. 39. Writers with the faces of howler monkeys speaking while pointing at (or writing in) the open books in front of them, which rest on other books. Rollout view of a Late Classic painting on a chocolate-drinking vessel.



into visible marks. In effect, the ink in the container takes the place of the breath that passes through a trumpet.

The small, bonelike objects in front of the monkeys' snouts do not represent vocal sounds but are nose ornaments whose real counterparts typically dangled from a string. The monkeys are indeed vocalizing, but this is indicated by the fact that they have their mouths wide open. The calls of howler monkeys, like the notes blown on conch-shell trumpets, are long-winded and low in pitch and carry very far.

Writing has another patron in the elderly deity Pawahtun, who is like the monkeys in the painting in wearing a hairnet. He is also a god of the four directions and is sometimes conceived as four separate gods. A painting that runs around the outer surface of a vertical-sided bowl shows two scenes in which two members of the Pawahtun foursome, both of them left-handed, teach writing to young pupils who appear to be thoroughly human (figures 40 and 41). One teacher has whiskers on his chin, and the other does not. On one side of the bowl, the bewhiskered teacher has a book with a jaguar-skin cover on the floor in front of him, and he speaks to a pair of rather stocky pupils while gesturing toward an open page with the reed pen he holds in his left hand (figure 40). The pupil in front has his eyes fixed on the page. The teacher has two additional reed pens stuck in his hairnet, and tucked in the front of the headdress of the more distant pupil is a cluster of objects that may be pens (indicated by the fine parallel lines that meet the top margin of the picture). The two round objects on the



Fig. 40. A bearded Pawahtun pointing out an error in the writing of numbers to two pupils. Rollout view of a Late Classic painting on the outer surface of a bowl with vertical sides. This image is half of a painting whose other half appears in figure 41.

teacher's back, which would be suspended from his neck by a cord, are gourd containers. One is for powdered tobacco and the other for powdered lime, the ingredients of a mixture made for chewing. The wearing of gourds is a badge of priestly status. The pupil in front also wears gourds, one of which is visible hanging on his chest.

Numbers are the subject of the lesson in progress, and the teacher, with a stern look on his face, is reading aloud what the front pupil has written on the open page. The bar-and-dot numbers that start behind the teacher's head, running to the right and then down in front of him, constitute a quotation of what he is saying. They are connected to his mouth by the thin, wavy line that reaches to the bottom number. Apparently he asked the pupil to set down a series of numbers with ascending values, but the pupil has written 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, and 11, with 10 missing and 11 out of place. The other pupil, instead of leaning forward and looking down at the page, stares blankly toward the teacher and keeps his arms folded.

On the other side of the bowl, the teacher without whiskers sits in front of two other pupils, again speaking sternly about the results of a writing exercise (figure 41). He, too, gestures toward something with his left hand, but he points with his forefinger instead of a pen. Again, the object of his attention and that of the pupil in front of him is something written, perhaps on a piece of paper that rests on the floor between them. This teacher, like the other one, has a couple of pens in his hairnet, but now the pupil in front is the one with a bunch of quill pens tucked in his headdress. Pairs of gourds hang on the chest of the teacher and on that of the pupil who sits behind.

In this scene, the lesson includes the writing of words other than numbers. The teacher's comment runs from left to right above his head and then down in front of him, again connected to his mouth by a wavy line. A clear interpretation of the entire quotation has yet to be worked out, but the teacher begins by reading aloud the pupil's



Fig. 41. A beardless Pawahtun pointing out an error in the writing of parallel phrases to two pupils. The other half of this painting appears in figure 40.

scrambled version (below at left) of a phrase whose correct form (at right) can be found in the Dresden Codex:



Leaving aside the differences in style between the painter of the vase and the writer of the codex, the pupil's error is clear. He has reversed the order of *yax* and *k'an* and split the two dots of the number 2 between them, writing 1 twice when he should have written 2 once. And instead of inserting a single space filler between the two dots, linking them to form the number 2, he has used two space fillers to enclose each of them, making it clear that he intends the number 1. The result is 1 *k'an* 1 *yax*, "1 yellow 1 green," instead of the desired 2 *yax k'an*, "the 2 that are green and yellow," a phrase that invokes a pair of ears of corn and alludes to the stars Castor and Pollux, which mark the celestial home of a corn deity (see chapter 16).

The second pupil, unlike his counterpart in the other scene, is looking at what was written and grasping the nature of the error. With one hand palm up and the other palm down, and with his forefingers extended at different angles, he gestures as if he imagined himself reversing the order of the *k'an* and *yax* signs. The next three characters in the quotation from the teacher have yet to be interpreted, but the last one, which constitutes his evaluation, is clear. Starting from the identical prefixes on the

front and top and then moving to the main sign, it reads *ta-ta-b'i*, yielding *tataab'*, which means “badly written.”

This painting reveals a number of things about the teaching of writing among ancient Mayans. The teachers and at least some of their students shared a priestly status, but the students were not yet allowed to wear hairnets. Exercises involved the use of pen and paper, with a progression from writing bar-and-dot numbers to writing phrases that might include numbers (as in the present example) but also involved syllabic signs and nonnumeric logographs.

None of the students in the painting has the body of an ordinary, hardworking corn farmer: one of them (on the right side of the scene involving numbers) has the well-developed upper body of an athlete, but the rest have the fat, sagging bellies of sedentary individuals. All of them would have come from families that were not fully dependent on food production or other hard physical labor for their livelihoods. Some would have come from royal households, but others could have come from families specializing in the arts, religion, medicine, or trade. In the case of works like the Vase of the Seven Gods, where the identity of the author can be traced, the trail often leads to a member of a royal family. But anonymous works are in the great majority, and it could be that only authors with royal pedigrees were so bold as to inscribe their own identities in the same space in which they wrote about gods and dynasties.

The pupils depicted in the painting are all males, but we have plenty of evidence that women were among those who learned to read and write. The figurine of the woman with a book on her lap (shown in full in the frontispiece) provides one example. Another example comes from a painted vase that shows women shamans healing a male patient. At the end of a long inscription, the artist signed her name and followed the last two characters with a small self-portrait (at right). The upper character belongs to her name, and the lower one, starting from the prefixes at left and on top and ending with the main sign, identifies her as an *ajtz'ib'*, or “writer.” In the picture, she leans forward, like most of the other writers who appear in paintings, holding a book in her left hand and a writing instrument in her right. Instead of stuffing her hair into a net, she has gathered it, tied it with a cloth, and let it fall forward. But like the others, she is bare chested, which is why the artist has painted herself with her breast hanging down.



In some Classic carvings and paintings, individuals who are marked as writers by the pens in their headdresses are described in the accompanying texts with characters like these:

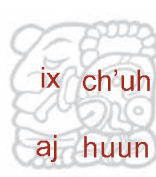




Fig. 42. Two seated men, marked as literate by the pens in their headbands. The two characters behind the speaker on the left identify him as a book person, and the two behind the head of the other speaker identify him as an interpreter. Detail from a Late Classic painting on a chocolate-drinking vessel.

The left-hand example reads *ajch'uh huun*, in which *aj-* is occupational, *ch'uh* means “to look after” or “care for” in this context, and *huun* is “books” or “papers.” The right-hand example reads *ix ajch'uh huun*, in which *ix* identifies the book person as a woman.

People whose occupation centered on books might have combined some or all of the roles of an author, calligrapher, copyist, librarian, researcher, or diviner. They might also have been called upon as speakers, whether they read aloud from a book or were more like the jongleurs of medieval Europe, who claimed textual authority for the stories they recited from memory. But there is evidence that the art of oral performance was separate, to some degree, from the art of reading and writing. A Late Classic vase painting of a palace scene seems to make such a distinction (figure 42). Seated before a lord are two men, both of them marked as literate by the bunches of pens tucked into their headbands and both of them speaking and gesturing. The two characters written behind the head of the man on the left identify him as an *ajch'uh huun*, a person in charge of books, but the two characters behind and above the right shoulder of the other man label him as a *chilam*, a person who speaks on behalf of someone else or interprets what someone else has said.

The *chilam* in this painting may be translating between two languages, one spoken by the book person behind him and the other spoken by the lord in front of him, or perhaps the difference is between two levels of usage in the same language. If the book

Fig. 43. Kneeling figures dressed as penitents. The man on the left is an orator who uses his upraised hand to make his voice carry, and the man on the right is a writer who holds a pen in his hand. Late Classic relief panels that flanked a stairway leading to a throne in the palace at Palenque.



Fig. 44. A court scene in which a visiting subject (at left) presents tribute to a lord on a dais (at center) while a scribe (at right) makes a mark in the small book he holds in his left hand. Rollout view of a portion of a Late Classic painting on a chocolate-drinking vessel from Nebaj, Guatemala.

central Mexico includes documents listing the names of subject towns and describing the kinds and amounts of tribute they owed.

Many of the scenes painted on Classic vases, like the one from Nebaj, are interspersed with brief texts that include the names of the actors. Similar scenes abound in the art of the Mixtecs of Oaxaca, but they appear in the pages of books. The example in figure 45, with the texts highlighted in red, is a court scene from page 9 of the Codex Bodley. The three characters are named by the signs written behind each of them, and the name of the year in which the event occurred is written between the standing visitor and the seated lord at the front of the dais. The character who shares the dais with the lord is his wife. Other scenes precede and follow this one, each one constituting an episode in a long narrative.

Some of the Classic Mayan books may well have been filled with scenes like the one on the Nebaj vase, taking their places in narratives like the ones that fill Mixtec books. If so, the balance between pictures and texts would have been different from the one

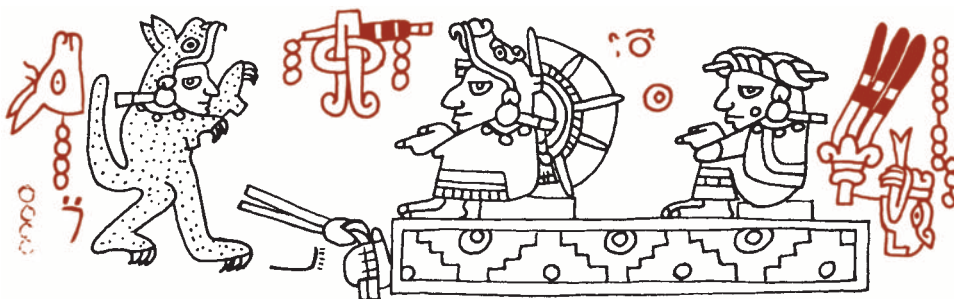


Fig. 45. A Mixtec court scene in which a visitor (at left) comes before a lord on a dais (at center) who has his wife seated behind him (at right). Highlighted in red are signs from the Mixtec writing system, naming the characters and the year in which the event occurred. Scene from a narrative in the Codex Bodley.

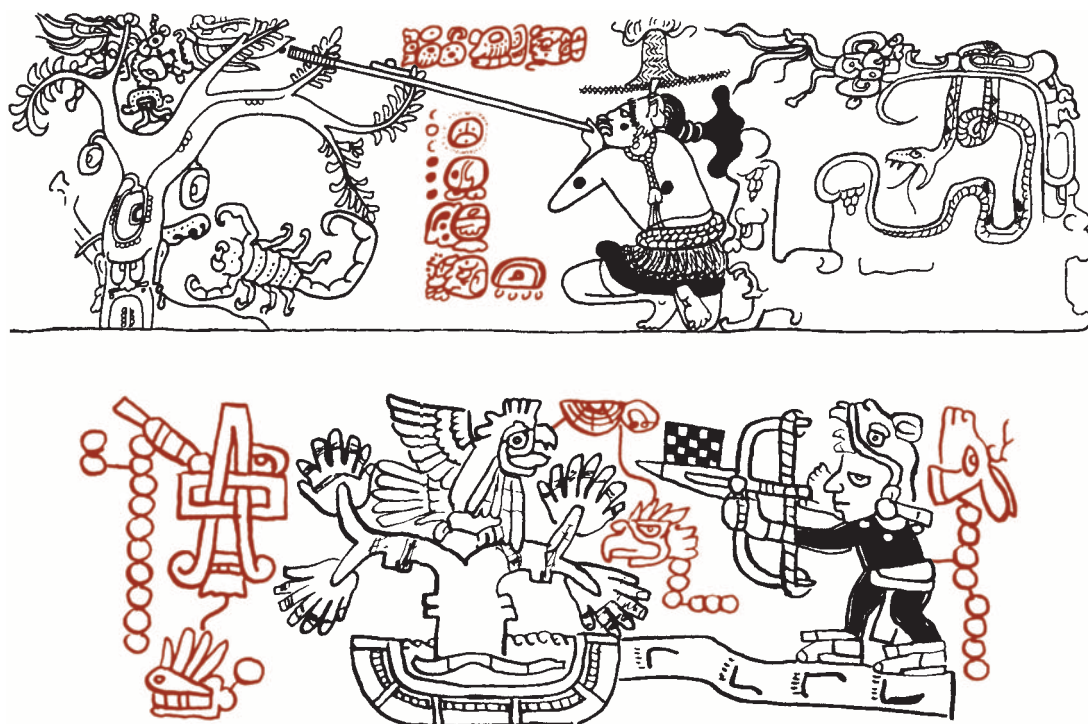


Fig. 46. Painted scenes from Mayan (above) and Mixtec (below) narratives, both of which combine texts (highlighted in red) and pictures in the same space. The Mayan scene is from a Late Classic chocolate-drinking vessel, but it could have been based on a scene in a book; the Mixtec scene is from an actual book, the Codex Bodley.

that prevails in the few Mayan books that survive. Instead of narratives carried by texts and supplemented with pictures, there would have been narratives carried by pictures and supplemented with texts.

Both of the scenes in figure 46, with their texts marked in red, are episodes from longer narratives. The upper scene, from a Classic Mayan vase, could have been based on a scene from a pictorial narrative in a book. The lower scene is from page 14 of the Codex Bodley, where it occupies a place in the same narrative as the court scene in figure 45. Despite obvious differences in drawing styles and writing systems, the two scenes have features that bespeak a shared tradition. Both encode the location of the event in the iconography rather than in the text. In the vase scene, the location is named to the right of the crouching hunter by the combination of a mountain, represented by an irregular mass with profiled faces on both sides and on top, and a dangling snake, yielding something like “Snake Mountain.” In the book scene, the location is named by the parrot, the tree, and the cross-sectioned river at the bottom of the tree, yielding “Parrot Tree River.”

In both scenes, the texts include the date of the event and the names of two characters in the narrative. On the vase, the calendar-round date is given by the first two characters in the lower text as 1 Ajaw 3 K’ank’in, “1 Lord 3 Yellow Sun.” In the book scene,



Fig. 47. Paintings modeled on pages from a book, from two sides of the four-sided Birth Vase. The subject is midwifery, performed by humans on the left and goddesses on the right. The human scene centers on a woman who is about to give birth, whereas the divine scene centers on an infant who is being delivered from the mouth of a dragon.

been attached to the center roof beam of her house. Her feet rest on the floor, which here takes the shape of the top of the head of an earth monster with one of its enormous eyes visible beneath her left foot and the other side of its face worn away. She is attended by two elderly midwives, one of them standing behind her and the other at the right side of the picture. On their heads, both midwives wear a spindle whose wound-up yarn symbolizes the growth of a child in the womb. Both of them have shamanic power, as their jaguar attributes attest. The right hand of the midwife behind the woman giving birth is turning into a jaguar paw, and the other midwife has a jaguar ear. The one with the paw is squeezing the abdomen of the woman who is giving birth, while the one with the ear holds the bowl that will receive the afterbirth.



Fig. 48. Two of the same goddesses who appear in the right-hand panel of figure 47, practicing as healers by purging the stomach of one of the monkey patrons of writing. Detail from a Late Classic chocolate-drinking vessel.

voted to the concerns of midwives. If writing by women on subjects of interest to women continued after the Late Classic period, no trace of it appears in early Spanish accounts. This is not surprising, given that all such accounts were written by men who received their information from men. As for alphabetic writing, the early missionaries offered instruction only to men, and the Mayan authors who used it to produce such works as the Chilam Balam books and the Popol Vuh were all men. The Birth Vase and the curing scene give us a glimpse of a lost world.



15 Signs of the Times

ONCE THERE WAS a world in which the divinatory calendar, with its 260 combinations of numbers and names for days, was the only measure of time. Already present in this world was the goddess whose names are Uh Ixik and Sak Ixik, “Moon Woman” and “Moonlight Woman,” but the moon had yet to travel through the loom of time, adding the weft threads of sidereal and synodic months to the warp threads of the progression of days. Also present was the god K’in Ajaw, “Day Lord” or “Sun Lord,” but the sun had yet to add the weft threads of seasons and years. Days already existed, but the only events that could have marked them off were the rising, setting, and reappearance of fixed stars in an otherwise dark sky.

The only inhabitants of that early world were gods—Moonlight Woman, Day Lord, and many others. Their actions are the subject of the almanacs that fill the first fifteen pages of the Dresden Codex. Each almanac deals with anywhere from two to twenty events, locating them within the framework of the divinatory calendar. All the events in an almanac involve the same action, but the actors and the results of their action change from one event to the next.

The narrative moves across an almanac from left to right, with the events occurring at measured intervals. The length of time covered by a single pass across an almanac is always 26, 52, or 65 days, and when that pass is completed, the same events are repeated with a different set of dates. An almanac with a narrative lasting 26 days provides for 10 repetitions, thus completing a total of 260 days. In a 52-day almanac, only 5 repetitions are needed to reach that total, and a 65-day almanac needs 4. The gods had no need to participate in these narratives more than once, but their actions continue to reverberate as the divinatory calendar goes on playing itself out in the human world, adding thread after thread to the loom of time. By this process, myths are converted into rituals and the divine past becomes the human present.

Neither the Dresden Codex nor any of the other codices contains a simple, day-by-day account of dates, whether in the form of a list or a table. The writers assumed that their readers knew how to count through the days of the divinatory calendar from memory. Each almanac is prefaced with a list of starting dates, but after that the reader is expected to rely on interval numbers to reach later dates. Sometimes the almanacs provide number coefficients for later dates, but the day names are nearly always left to the memory of the reader. The diviners of present-day highland Guatemala rely entirely on their memories to count beyond a chosen starting date, simultaneously keeping track of each combination of number and name as they go.

THE CHILD WHO CUTS HIS OWN UMBILICAL CORD

The first readable almanac in Dresden is on the second page, the first page having been reduced to a blur by heavy use. Even on the second page most of the red ink has worn away, but the black ink remains. Traces of horizontal red lines divide the page into four registers, each of them containing an almanac whose narrative repeats at 52-day intervals. Figure 49 shows the first of these almanacs and a key to its contents.

Some of the coating of the paper has chipped off, leaving a blank area at the upper right of the almanac, but its organization is clear. At the left edge is a column with the number 13 at the top, followed by five day names. The original bars and dots of the number, which were written in red, have been replaced by black ones, filled in by a reader who knew what should be there. Each day name that follows is meant to be prefaced with this number. The first date in the series is 13 Kawak, or “13 Pride.”

The first event in the almanac, described and pictured in the second column, comes 5 days after the opening date (see the key). The number 5, written with a single black bar between the caption and the picture, has an empty space to the right of it. Once there was a red number here, corresponding to the date of the event in this column, but the reader who restored the number 13 in the first column did not do the same for later day numbers.

The next event, described and pictured in the third column, comes 12 days after the first one. The writer has fit descriptions of later events into narrower columns, leaving no room for further pictures. The interval numbers needed to reach these events sit at the bottoms of the columns: 11, 12, and 12. In the last column, the length of the narrative reaches 52 days, where the event falls on 13 Chuwen, or “13 Artisan.” This date brings the reader back to the first column, where it occupies second place in the list of five dates. It serves two purposes at once, bringing one narrative to an end and announcing the start of another with a different series of dates. A second complete run through the events will bring the count to the third date on the list, 13 Ak’b’al, or “13 Night,” and the third and fourth runs will bring it to 13 Men, or “13 Work,” and then 13 Manik’, or “13 Deer,” at the bottom of the list. Starting from there, a fifth run will complete a grand total of 260 days and bring the reader back to the date at the head of the list.

For the first event, the action undertaken by the god in the picture is described by the two characters at right. The prefix of the first character is an image of the stone head of an ax, and *ch’ak* is a verb for chopping or cutting through something. The *b’a* of the main sign makes this verb reflexive. In the prefix to the second character,



t- is prepositional and -u makes the object of the preposition “his.” The remaining signs spell out this object, which is *tuuch*, “umbilical cord.” In other words, the actor in this event “cuts his own umbilical cord.” The next character in the caption



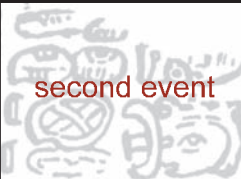
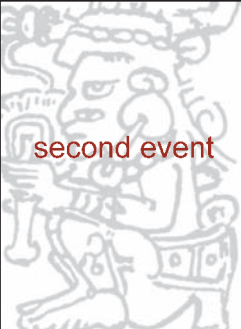
13					
starting day names	first event	second event			
	5 days later	12 days later	third event	fourth event	fifth event
			11 days later	12 days later	12 days later

Fig. 49. The first readable almanac in the Dresden Codex, from page 2a. The chart below it shows the organization of the text and pictures.

names him as Jun Ajaw, or “One Lord,” one of the twin heroes whose exploits are depicted in numerous vase paintings of the Classic period. It would seem that like Junajpu, his counterpart in the Popol Vuh, he was precocious from the very beginning of his life.

The fourth character in the caption, which gives the portent of One Lord’s action, reads *mul* or possibly *umul*, meaning that some kind of news is on the way or that the news of his action will spread, making him famous. In his picture, which seems

13 is the number of the starting days:

Pride

Artisan

Night

Work

Deer.

When he cuts his own umbilical cord,

One Lord becomes famous.

5 days bring 5

Net

Wax

Sunk

Lord

Stairway.

Food and drink flow from the umbilical cord

of the wife of Corn.

12 days bring 4

Wax

Sunk

Lord

Stairway

Net.

When Corn has
Moonlight Woman
as his wife,
something new happens.

11 days bring 2 *Deer, Pride, Artisan, Night, Work.*

When . . .
. . . umbilical cord
of his wife,
Moonlight Woman.

12 days bring 1 *Pride, Artisan, Night, Work, Deer.*

. . .
. . .
. . .
. . .

12 days bring 13 *Artisan, Night, Work, Deer, Pride.*



Pekaj has two meanings. The god could either be making a sound, especially a deep and powerful sound, or be holding an object in his hand. The sound he makes or the object he holds is described as his *chich*, which can mean either “word” or “power.” Some of the gods in the pictures gesture with their hands, and in most such cases they have their mouths open as if they are speaking. Others, some of them with their mouths shut, hold wands or scepters in front of them. The translation offered here renders *pekaj tu chich* as “the sound of the word” of empty-handed gods and as “the power in the hands” of gods who hold objects. But a god might also “sound his power,” in the sense of having a powerful voice or using powerful words, or might “hold his word in his hands,” in the sense of using his hands to make meaningful gestures.

The god who appears first in this almanac (see page 175) is called “Water Lily Serpent, Wind Quetzal Serpent” in the translation on the basis of his known attributes rather than the two characters that name him, which remain undeciphered. In Classic art, he sometimes wears an ear ornament with a wind sign. Elsewhere in Dresden he is depicted as a snake with a water lily on his head, and the scepter he holds in the present picture takes the form of a snake. Mounted behind him is a quetzal bird, with its head behind his own and its tail hanging down his back, and the bird and the snake together associate him with K’uk’ulkan, the “Plumed Serpent” of Yucatán. He reappears in the eighth episode (at the bottom of page 177), where he looks younger, wears less formal attire, and holds a different scepter. The caption for this picture reverses his two names. One of them is prefaced with the number 3, a reference to his sometime role as the patron deity of that number.

Occupying second place in the sequence (at the bottom of page 175) is Chaak, whose name is translated as “Thunderstorm” here but could also be rendered as “Lightning Bolt,” “Rainstorm,” or “Downpour.” He was one of the most frequently invoked deities in Yucatán, and in most of the almanacs that fill the second half of the Dresden Codex he is the sole actor.

The third god (at the top of page 176) is Pawahtun, and although he is pictured as a single being, his name is prefaced with the number 4, referring to the existence of four Pawahtuns corresponding to the four sides or corners of the world. He is followed (in the middle of the same page) by a god whose name has been lost from the present text but is given elsewhere in Dresden as P’e, “Split,” or Tz’up’e, “Split Down the Middle.” His celestial home is between Scorpius and Sagittarius, where the path of



10 is the number of the starting days:



Ceiba



Lack



Snake



Earth



Tribute.



The power in the hands

of Water Lily Serpent, Wind Quetzal Serpent

has a meaning that cannot be unraveled.

2 days bring **12**

Night

Work

Deer

Pride

Artisan.



The sound *of the word*

of the Lord of 9 Gifts, Thunderstorm,

brings changes, wedding feasts.

4 more days bring **3**

Deer

Pride

Artisan

Night

Work.





The sound of the word

of . . . ,

Fourfold Pawahtun brings. . . .

3 more days bring 6

Foot

Wind

Jaguar

Death

Blade.



The power in the hands

of Split Down the Middle, . . .

is a portent of. . . .

2 more days bring 8

Stairway

Net

Wax

Sunk

Lord.



The sound of the word

of the sower of clouds brings wedding feasts.

He is the lord of medicine, of wellness.

4 more days bring 12

Wax

Sunk

Lord

Stairway

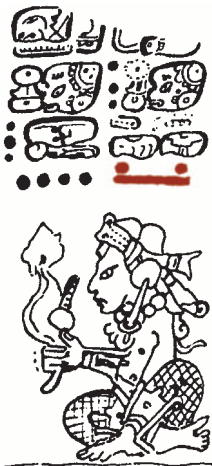
Net.



The sound of *the word*
 of the Lord of Day, 7 . . .
 brings a sudden fever, work comes to an end.
 2 more days bring 1
Blade
Foot
Wind
Jaguar
Death.



The sound of the word
 of 11 Earth, with his blemish,
 brings a harvest of sprouts, a change of lords.
 2 more days bring 3
Lord
Stairway
Net
Wax
Sunk.



The power *in the hands*
 of *Wind Quetzal Serpent*, 3 *Water Lily Serpent*,
 brings wedding feasts, plenty of food and drink.
 4 more days bring 7
Net
Wax
Sunk
Lord
Stairway.



*The power in the hands
of the god who cuts off his own head
brings news. . . .*

2 more days bring 9

Death

Blade

Foot

Wind

Jaguar.



*The sound of the word
of the god of merchants . . .
. . . brings flowers.*

2 more days bring 11

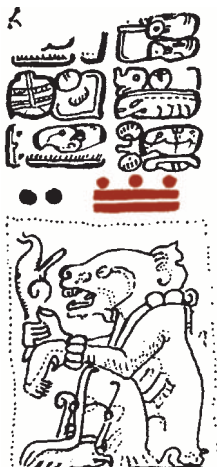
Sunk

Lord

Stairway

Net

Wax.



*The power in the hands
of the Dog who brings work to an end
has a meaning that can't be unraveled.*

2 more days bring 13

Foot

Wind

Jaguar

Death

Blade.



The sound of the word
of Fire Scepter, the strong young man,
brings flowers, wedding feasts.
4 more days bring 4

Jaguar

Death

Blade

Foot

Wind.



The sound of the word
of the Dwarf brings news,
warns of something bad.
2 more days bring 6

Wax

Sunk

Lord

Stairway

Net.



The sound of the word
of Great Jaguar makes things better,
brings plenty of food and drink; things change.
3 more days bring 9

Pride

Artisan

Night

Work

Deer.



The sound of the word
of Lord Vulture . . .
work comes to an end. . . .

2 more days bring 11

Ceiba

Lack

Snake

Earth

Tribute.



The power in the hands
of True Magician brings flowers,
. . . gets better.

3 more days bring 1

Net

Wax

Sunk

Lord

Stairway.



The sound of the word
of the one who picks all the fruit brings bad
news, work comes to an end.

2 more days bring 3

Death

Blade

Foot

Wind

Jaguar.



The sound of the word
of Corn brings plentiful food and drink,
wedding feasts in the evening.

3 more days bring 5

Tribute

Ceiba

Lack

Snake

Earth.



The sound of the word
of 13 Sky Owl
brings news of a bloody fight.

2 more days bring 8

Artisan

Night

Work

Deer

Pride.



The sound of the word
of Death, whose touch comes suddenly,
portends something new.

2 more days bring 10

Lack

Snake

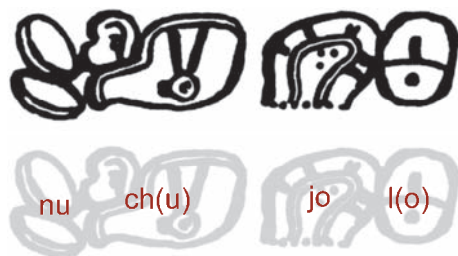
Earth

Tribute

Ceiba.

THEY PUT THEIR HEADS TOGETHER

Running parallel to the Almanac of the Nineteen Gods, on the middle register of Dresden pages 8 and 9, are two almanacs in which the gods converse with one another rather than make pronouncements. The pictures show two gods sitting face-to-face, gesturing with their hands while talking. The captions describe their interaction with this pair of characters:



Nuch is “to join” and *jol* is “heads,” yielding an expression that means the same thing as “they put their heads together” in English.

One of these almanacs spans 52 days, and the other spans 65. Despite their difference in length, they are organized in the same way. They both describe the first of two events with six characters that serve as a caption for an illustration that runs twice the usual width, and they describe the second event with four characters and no illustration.

At the head of the list of five starting day names that prefaces the first almanac is a bar-and-dot 8 in red (see page 184). The other almanac spells out the number that heads the list of four day names with black syllabic signs for *o* and *xo*, yielding *ox*, “three” (see page 185). The intervals that separate the events in both almanacs are large enough to be written with two-place numbers, but they are not rendered in this way. In the first almanac, the interval number (used twice) is 26, which could be written as a two-place number, with a single dot for 20 above and a dot and bar for 6 below. Instead, a logograph that means *k'al*, or “twenty,” without reference to its place in a larger number, is combined with a bar-and-dot 6. For the first event, *k'al* is written in front of 6, and the translation reads “a score and 6,” but for the second event, 6 is written above *k'al*, and the translation reads “6 and a score.” In the other almanac, both intervals are written with *k'al* in front of a bar-and-dot number, 13 in one case and 12 in the other, yielding totals of 33 and 32 days.

Pictured and named in both almanacs is Itzamnaaj, or “True Magician,” who sits on the left for his first appearance and on the right for his second. In the first almanac, he is dressed rather informally, but in the second, he wears the finery of a great lord. The caption refers to his first conversant only as *le'ti ajam*, “this lord,” as if the reader would know him from the accompanying picture. Judging from the black spots on his forehead and chin, he may well be One Lord. The conversant in the other picture is Nal, “Corn.” Again, as in the Almanac of the Nineteen Gods, he wears the logograph for *k'an*, or “ear of ripe corn,” on his head.



8 is the number of the starting days:



Deer



Pride



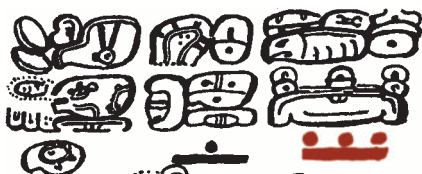
Artisan



Night



Work.



They put their heads together:
True Magician makes flowers bloom.
This other lord makes seeds.
A score and 6 days bring 8



Lack

Snake

Earth

Tribute

Ceiba.



They put their
heads together:

Death and

13 Sky Owl.



Days numbered 8
Pride, Artisan, Night, Work, Deer
come after 6 and a score more days.



Three *is the number of the starting days:*

Tribute

Jaguar

Pride

Net.



They put their heads together:

True Magician makes flowers bloom.

Corn produces drink and food.

A score and 13 days bring **10**

Wind

Deer

Stairway

Earth.



They put their

heads together:

Death and

Split Down the Middle.



Days numbered **3**

Jaguar, Pride, Net, Tribute

come after a score and 12 more days.



16 Moon Woman Meets the Stars

IN THE ALMANACS that fill the first fifteen pages of the Dresden Codex, the connecting thread is the action, which remains the same from one event to another while the actors change. Next come eight pages in which most of the almanacs have two connecting threads: one is repeated action, as before, and the other is repeated appearances of the goddess named Moon Woman or Moonlight Woman. She is present for every event in these almanacs, interacting with a second character who is different from one occasion to the next. Each successive character occupies a different position in the sky, marked by stars or (in one case) a feature of the Milky Way that lies along the Mayan zodiac.

The sidereal month, the time necessary for the moon to complete a circuit among the fixed stars, is 27.3222 days. The Mayan zodiac has thirteen equal sections, so that the moon spends an average of 2.1017 days in each. But none of the lunar almanacs simply tracks the moon from one section to the next. The shortest interval between events is 4 days, enough to move the moon ahead by two sections, and the longest interval is 33 days, enough to complete a sidereal month and then move the moon three sections beyond the position of the previous event.

Most of the lunar almanacs have five starting dates, with a single reading of the events spanning 52 days. That leaves the moon 2.6444 days short of completing two sidereal months, more than enough to leave it in a different section of the zodiac from the one in which it started. To repeat the narrative while using the specified starting dates, the reader needs to compensate for this discrepancy. Some of the other astronomical sections of the Dresden Codex are prefaced with instructions for overcoming discrepancies, but the lunar almanacs provide no such help to their readers. All we can do is look for a hypothetical solution that keeps the narratives reasonably in line with observable phenomena.

The simplest solution is to let $2 \times 260 = 520$ days go by after completing a single reading and then to begin a new one using the same starting date as before. This approach puts the moon a little less than 1 day beyond the 519.1104 days of 19 sidereal months. If we apply this method twice, running up $4 \times 260 = 1,040$ days, the moon will still run less than 2 days behind, at 1,038.2230 days for 38 sidereal months. For a third reading, we need only drop down the list of starting dates by one row and thus add 52 days, bringing the total to 1,092 days. This is less than one day short of the 1,092.8664 days of 40 sidereal months. A fourth reading is then possible if we return to the strategy of waiting 520 days and staying on the same row, reaching a total of

1,612 days and thus falling less than three hours short of the 1,612.0098 days of 59 sidereal months.

BURDENS ON THE BACK OF MOON WOMAN

Lunar almanacs can be divided into three types, defined by the words that describe Moon Woman's relationship to her counterparts and the moon's relationship to the stars that mark the homes of the counterparts. The commonest relationship is the one specified by this character:



In an almanac of this kind, each of Moon Woman's counterparts is *ukuch*, "her burden," and she carries them on her back in the pictures. Restated in astronomical terms, this characterization means that the moon is rising just ahead of the stars corresponding to the burden.

The lunar almanac presented on pages 188–89 comes from the middle register of Dresden pages 16–17. Moon Woman carries a succession of four deities as her burden, resulting in four auguries. In her right hand, she holds a logograph that reads *wa*, referring to foods made of corn dough and ultimately to food in general, but the captions say nothing about this food. Red day numbers were omitted by a scribe who got ahead of himself while writing in black and forgot to go back and fill them in. Words appearing in italics in the translation provide information that is not included in the almanac but would be known to a diviner. The day names in italics have been counted from the names in the opening list, using the black interval numbers provided for each event.

The locations of the four events in the narrative of this almanac can be tracked through the sky. Moon Woman's second counterpart, whose location is clear from other sources, provides a point from which to measure the distances to the others. The star maps that follow have been calculated for the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century in the latitude of northern Yucatán. Running across each chart is a horizontal line representing a portion of the eastern horizon, with a mark indicating due east. The rising moon's position on the horizon is indicated by the character for *Uh Ixik*, "Moon Woman."

To this day, Mayans prefer to use easily observable phenomena when tracking the progress of the night and the seasons, including very bright stars, dense clusters of stars such as the Pleiades and the Hyades, and the dark areas that split part of the Milky Way into two strands. Wherever an area of the Western zodiac contains nothing but dim stars, Mayan observers reach well outside it. Such is the case with the attention they give to the stars of Orion, including the ones that mark the triangle of the Three

These are the starting days:

Tribute

Ceiba

Lack

Snake

Earth.

Thunderstorm is the burden
of Moon Woman. Lords do their work.
13 days bring

Wind

Jaguar

Death

Blade

Foot.

Death is the burden
of Moon Woman. Something new happens.
4 days bring

Death

Blade

Foot

Wind

Jaguar.

True Magician
is the burden
of Moon Woman.
Flowers bloom.

20 days bring *Death, Blade, Foot, Wind, Jaguar.*

Split Down the Middle
is the burden
of Moon Woman.
Nothing happens.

15 days bring *Ceiba, Lack, Snake, Earth, Tribute.*



Map 6. The moon as it rises ahead of most of the bright stars in Orion. Chaak, or “Thunderstorm,” may correspond to Betelgeuse. The triangle marks the hearthstone stars.

Hearthstones. When the moon is in the position shown in map 6, rising just ahead of the Three Hearthstones and most of the other bright stars in Orion, the almanac names Chaak, or “Thunderstorm,” as Moon Woman’s burden. The exact location of his stars is not known, but if they included a bright one not accounted for as a hearthstone, Betelgeuse is an obvious candidate. It stands out as the only star with a reddish hue in this area.

After a 4-day interval comes the second event of the almanac, which puts Moon Woman in a position where the brightest star that follows behind her is Regulus, in Leo (map 7). Her current burden is Kimil, or “Death.” Mayan observers saw the stars in the Sickles of Leo (connected by lines in the map) as ornaments outlining the profiled skull of Death. The zodiacal almanac of the Paris Codex pictures such a skull swallowing the sun (figure 50).

Moon Woman reaches her third position after 20 more days, taking Itzamnaaj, or “True Magician,” as

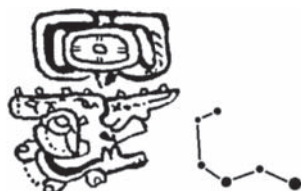
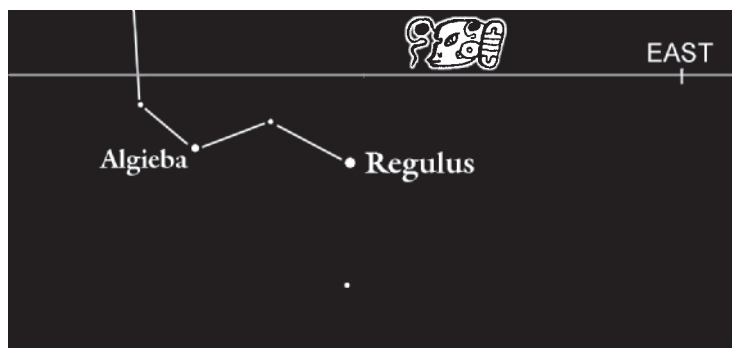


Fig. 50. The skull of Death, facing upward, opening its mouth to eat the sun in the zodiacal almanac of the Paris Codex. The round ornaments on the skull and its eye are star signs. To the right is a diagram of the Sickles of Leo.



Map 7. The moon as it rises ahead of Regulus, the brightest star in Leo, the home of Death, and one of the stars in the Sickles (connected with lines).



Map 8. The moon as it rises ahead of the Hyades, the three-pronged wand of True Magician, in Taurus.

her burden. Following behind the moon, still out of sight, are Aldebaran and the other stars of the Hyades (connected by lines in map 8), which are in Taurus. Mayan observers in Yucatán saw the Hyades as a three-pronged wand held by True Magician, who is shown in figure 51 as he is depicted in the Almanac of the Nineteen Gods (see chapter 15).

Another 15 days bring Moon Woman to her fourth position, where her burden is another god who appears in the Almanac of the Nineteen Gods, Tz'up'e, or "Split Down the Middle" (map 9). Here the moon rises just ahead of the opening of the Great Rift in the Milky Way, which lies north of Sagittarius.

In the almanac presented on page 192, from the lower register of Dresden pages 18–19, the writer has filled in the red day numbers. As before, there are



Fig. 51. Itzamnaaj, or "True Magician," holding a three-pronged wand. From the Almanac of the Nineteen Gods in the Dresden Codex.



Map 9. The moon as it rises ahead of the opening of the Great Rift, the home of Split Down the Middle, in the Milky Way.



13 is the number of the starting days:



Lord



Stairway



Net



Wax



Sunk



White Frog/ Red Frog is the burden

of Moon Woman. Something new happens.

A score and 12 days bring 6

Death

Blade

Foot

Wind

Jaguar.



The 2 that are green and yellow are the burden

of Corn. Drink and food are plentiful.

A score of days brings 13

Death

Blade

Foot

Wind

Jaguar.



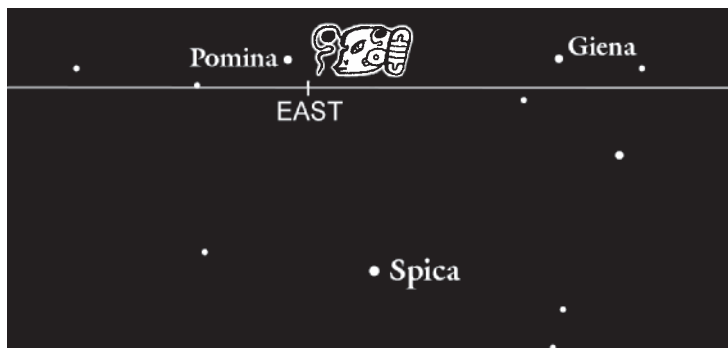
five starting dates for a narrative that spans 52 days. The italics in the translation add information that would be known to a diviner.



The first caption offers an example of the use of a single character to write a couplet consisting of two parallel noun phrases (above). *Much* is a noun that is meant to be read twice, once for each of the adjectives supplied by the prefixes. The result is Sak Much / Chak Much, “White Frog / Red Frog.” These words do more than give a name to the celestial being Moon Woman carries on her back; they belong to the poetry of incantation, whose purpose is to summon the presence of spiritual beings. The same pair of color terms (but with red mentioned before white) occurs in the incantations recorded in the alphabetic Ritual of the Bacabs, which served as a handbook for shamans in Yucatán. The two colors serve as metonyms for a full range of colors. Here they make the frog carried by Moon Woman stand for all possible frogs. It is the guardian spirit of the goddess who resides in this location, whose name, according to the Dresden Venus table and the Ritual of the Bacabs, is Ix Ajaw Nah, “Lady of the House.”

Moon Woman is not mentioned in the second caption, but the text indicates that her burden belongs to her counterpart, Nal, or “Corn.” His burden is *rax k'an*, which could mean that its contents are “green (or blue)” and “yellow” or that they are “new (or fresh)” and “ripe.” If ears of corn are the burden, they could be blue and yellow, or all the ears could be yellow, still fresh inside their green husks. In the picture, Moon Woman is the carrier of the burden, but it consists of the same *rax* and *k'an* logographs as in the caption. The message seems to be that the burden she carries is not a deity named Corn but rather the bounty he can offer. In effect, her burden is already an augury of what happens when the moon rises ahead of his stars, and the caption merely offers a comment: “drink and food are plentiful.”

When Moon Woman carries the frog as her burden, the moon rises ahead of Spica, the brightest star in Virgo (map 10). The words “White Frog / Red Frog” may refer directly to Spica. The zodiacal almanac in the Paris Codex also puts a frog in this area



Map 10. The moon as it rises ahead of Spica, the brightest star in Virgo, the home of White Frog / Red Frog.



Map 11. The moon as it rises ahead of Castor and Pollux, or “the two that are green and yellow,” in Gemini.

of the sky, and as we saw in chapter 12, the Madrid Codex depicts this frog as a bringer of rain.

After 33 days, the burden of Moon Woman (or Corn) is “the 2 that are green (or blue) and yellow.” As it turns out, she carries not only ears of corn but a pair of stars as well, because the moon rises ahead of Castor and Pollux in Gemini (map 11). Another god named Corn, the so-called Tonsured Maize God we encountered in the inscriptions at Palenque, resides on the opposite side of the sky in the region of Sagittarius or Capricornus. In distinguishing between these two gods, the Chilam Balam book from the town of Tizimín calls one of them “the two-day sign.” This would seem to be a reference to the fact that it takes 2 days for Castor and Pollux to complete their entrance into the sky as the bringers of night, rising over the eastern horizon before any other stars become visible there. When Castor shows up at dusk for the first time, it is joined by Pollux on the next day. The two stars also happen to be distinct in color, with a cool white for Castor and a warm yellow tint for Pollux. Together, they may have been seen as signs of color differences in varieties of corn.

BIRDS THAT TAKE FLIGHT AHEAD OF MOON WOMAN



In two of the Dresden lunar almanacs, Moon Woman’s counterparts rise above her rather than riding on her back. Most of them are described as *umunt*, “her herald,” by the character at left.

Munt is also a term for birds whose sudden flight was regarded as ominous, such as the Great Curassow, and most of the heralds in these almanacs are birds or bats. In the pictures, they open their wings and take flight, rising over Moon Woman’s head. The corresponding stars appear above the horizon ahead of the moon.

Six heralds precede Moon Woman in the almanac presented on pages 195–97, which comes from the lower register of Dresden pages 16–17. Each complete run of

These are the starting days:

Tribute

Jaguar

Pride

Net

Tribute.

13 Sky Owl is the herald
of Moon Woman. Something is hidden.

8 days bring

Earth

Wind

Deer

Stairway

Earth.

Quetzal brings news
of Moon Woman. Wedding feasts take place.

13 days bring

Foot

Work

Lord

Snake

Foot.

Macaw is complete as the herald
of Moonlight Woman. Something is hidden.
13 days bring
Night
Sunk
Lack
Blade
Night.

Bat Hawk
is Moon Woman's
herald.
Lords do their work.

13 days bring *Wax, Ceiba, Death, Artisan, Wax.*

Lord Vulture
is complete as the herald
of Moon Woman.
Nothing happens.

8 days bring *Net, Tribute, Jaguar, Pride, Net.*

Turkey

is the harbinger

of Moon Woman.

Food and drink are plentiful.

10 days bring *Jaguar, Pride, Net, Tribute, Jaguar.*



Map 12. The stars of the Big Dipper, or Macaw, rising ahead of the moon.

the tip of the tail of the ascending Macaw, rising just ahead of the moon. At this point, Macaw has become Moonlight Woman's *xul muut*, or "complete herald," as the caption puts it.

The text describes the fourth herald, who comes after another 13-day interval, as *ya sotz'il*, or "batlike." His location, in the general area of eastern Pisces, is occupied by a bat in the Paris zodiac. The present almanac has no picture, but the other Dresden almanac that deals with Moon Woman's heralds shows him as a bird rather than a bat (figure 52). The bird has the beak and talons of a raptor, which suggests that it is the small hawk called *sutz' muwan*, or "bat hawk," in Ch'orti'. Perhaps the writer who drew the bat in the Paris zodiac was reinterpreting what was originally a hawk, or the writer who named and drew the "batlike" bird in the Dresden lunar almanacs was reinterpreting what was originally a bat.

The fifth herald, who takes flight 8 days later, is the King Vulture we already encountered in the Almanac of the Nineteen Gods. The brightest stars rising ahead of the moon in map 13 (next page) are Capella (in Auriga) and Aldeberan (in Taurus). Because Aldeberan and the Hyades are accounted for by True Magician, Capella remains as a prominent candidate for a star belonging to King Vulture. He is the avian guardian spirit of Jun Ajaw, or "One Lord," and the Dresden Venus table locates One Lord himself in this same area of the sky.



Fig. 52. A hawk described as "batlike" rises above Moon Woman. From a lunar almanac in the Dresden Codex.



Map 13. Capella (in Auriga) and Aldebaran (in Taurus) rising ahead of the moon. Capella may be one of the stars of the King Vulture and One Lord.

The passing of 10 more days brings Kutz, or “Turkey.” This is the last of Moon Woman’s heralds, residing somewhere in the area of Libra.

MEETING MOON WOMAN FACE-TO-FACE

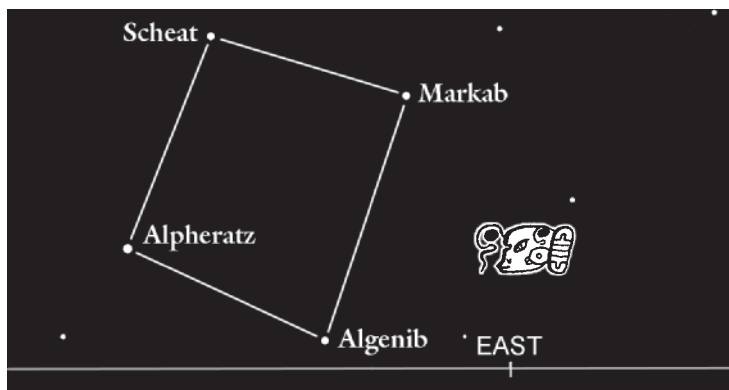
Three almanacs describe the relationship between Moon Woman and her counterparts with this character:



Yatan can mean that she is “the wife of” her counterpart, but a more literal meaning is that her counterpart is “face-to-face” with her, which is the position we see in the pictures. Restating the matter in astronomical terms, the corresponding stars rise neither before nor after the moon but appear on the same level with the moon.

In the almanac presented on pages 201–2, from the lower register of Dresden pages 21–22, Moon Woman comes face-to-face with four different deities. The first is Jop Pawahtun, or “Shining Pawahtun,” whose name is elsewhere prefaced with *kan*, meaning “four” or “square.” The moon itself is among the stars of Pisces, which are faint. But nearby are the four bright stars shown in map 14, forming what Western observers call the Great Square of Pegasus. The square is on a tilt when it rises, as it is in the map, but when it straddles the meridian, its four sides face the four directions. Moreover, in Mayan latitudes, it passes directly overhead, enclosing the zenith. Mayans must have assigned Pawahtun (or the Pawahtuns of the four directions) to this location because they saw the square as a four-cornered microcosm.

After 21 days, Moon Woman finds herself face-to-face with a young man named Yax B’alam, or “First Jaguar,” the brother of Jun Ajaw, or “One Lord.” At this time, the

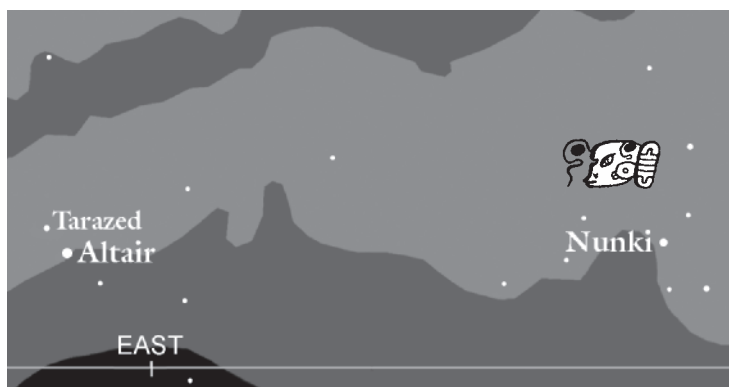


Map 14. The moon rising with the stars of the Great Square of Pegasus (marked with lines), the home of Pawahtun (or the four Pawahtuns).

moon is in a position where the brightest rising stars close to her level are Nunki (in Sagittarius) and Altair (in Aquila), as shown in map 15. The zodiacal almanac in the Paris Codex assigns a jaguar to this same general area of the sky.

Moon Woman's third encounter, coming 15 days after her meeting with First Jaguar, brings her face-to-face with a personage who is difficult to identify. Prefixed to the name is the number 4, which has *kan* as its sound value and could mean "sky." The main sign is a profiled head that looks like the logograph for *maax*, "monkey," but it is missing the solid black areas that normally fill much of the space in that sign. The picture is a generic representation of an elderly male, lacking enough detail to permit a specific identification. The location is in the general area of Cancer, where the only bright star nearby is Procyon, in Canis Minor.

The fourth event in this almanac, coming 10 days later, brings Moon Woman face-to-face with Split Down the Middle. At this time, the moon is on a level with the opening of the Great Rift.



Map 15. The moon rising with Nunki and Altair, the brightest stars in Sagittarius and Aquila. First Jaguar has his home in this area.

These are the starting days:

Earth

Tribute

Ceiba

Lack

Snake.

Shining Pawahtun is face-to-face

with Moon Woman. Lords take their thrones.

5 days bring

Wind

Jaguar

Death

Blade

Foot.

First Jaguar is face-to-face

with Moon Woman. There is deceit.

A score and 1 days bring

Night

Work

Deer

Pride

Artisan.

Sky . . . is face-to-face with her.

Wedding feasts take place, flowers bloom.

16 days bring

Pride

Artisan

Night

Work

Deer.

Face-to-face

are Split Down the Middle

and Moon Woman.

Something new happens.

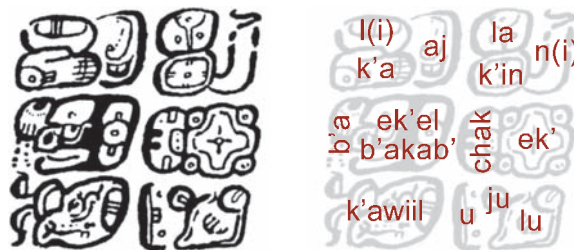
10 days bring *Tribute, Ceiba, Lack, Snake, Earth.*



17 The Power of the Great Star

THE STORY OF the planet Venus, called Chak Ek', "Red Star" or "Great Star," is told in the pages that immediately follow the lunar almanacs in the Dresden Codex. It is a story that requires the addition of new threads to the weft of time. Venus takes 584 days to complete its period, appearing as the morning star, disappearing for a time, reappearing as the evening star, and disappearing again before it repeats its role as the morning star. The idealized year of 365 days also becomes a thread in the story, with five Venus periods and eight years adding up to the same total: 2,920 days. The codex organizes the events in the story into a five-page table, with one page for each of the five periods. After one pass across the table, Venus begins to repeat the sequence of its previous relationships to the fixed stars. For example, when it makes its next five appearances as the morning star, the sidereal locations of these events are similar to what they were during the previous eight years.

What happens when the Great Star enters the space of a deity who resides among the fixed stars is quite different from what happens in the lunar almanacs. Moon Woman, as one deity moving among others, has an interpersonal relationship with her counterparts. The Great Star, on the other hand, is not a deity but rather the visible sign of a dangerous power that passes from one deity to another, taking the form of a dart when one of them seizes it. Whoever holds this dart is transformed into a warrior who loads it into his dart thrower and shoots a neighboring deity, as is shown in the pictures that illustrate the table. Here is the caption for two of these pictures, one showing the warrior and the other his target:



K'aalaj means that something is "caught" or "taken hold of," and *lak'in* means that this happens "where the day begins," or at dawn. The captured object is the Chak Ek', "Great Star," or the dart corresponding to it, and the deity who catches it is the patron of merchants, here named Ek'el B'akab', or "Black Actor." Then comes a second clause, *K'awiil ujulu*, meaning something like "Fire Scepter is the one who gets shot." The first

picture below this caption shows Black Actor as a warrior (figure 53). Instead of holding a staff and carrying a backpack, as he does when he plays his role as a merchant, he holds a shield in one hand and a dart thrower in the other. He has already shot a dart at a target below him in the sky and pictured lower on the same page (figure 54). The dart, which has a hooked tip, has hit Fire Scepter in his midsection, knocking him to the ground and causing him to cry in pain and drop his shield (the oval object at lower left).

Black Actor resides in the area of Pisces, and when he is in the east, Fire Scepter, who resides in Aries, is immediately below him. But only when Black Actor possesses the power of the Great Star does he shoot his neighbor with a dart. When he is in his role as traveling merchant, he may carry Fire Scepter as his burden, as Moon Woman would do if she were rising with the stars of Fire Scepter right behind her. In figure 55, which shows Black Actor with his walking staff, his burden is Fire Scepter as an infant—or perhaps he carries an icon of Fire Scepter, intended for sale.

As in the pages that precede the story of the Great Star, each event is assigned a number of possible dates on the 260-day divinatory calendar. But now, for the first time, dates from the 365-day calendar are listed as well, making it possible for the reader to create composite dates of the calendar-round kind. Moreover, the table has a



Fig. 53. Black Actor (Ek'el B'akab') armed with the power of the Great Star and looking down toward his target, who is pictured in figure 54. From the Venus table of the Dresden Codex.



Fig. 54. Fire Scepter, wounded and knocked to the ground by a dart shot by Black Actor (in figure 53).



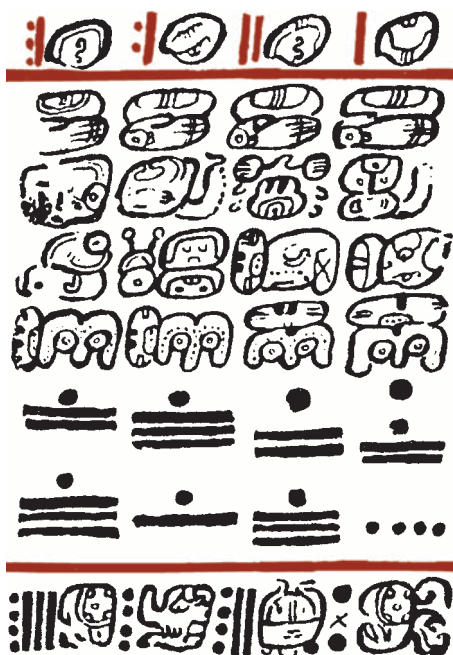
Fig. 55. Black Actor in his role as a merchant, carrying Fire Scepter on his back instead of shooting him. A Terminal Classic carving on a column from Santa Rosa Xtampak, in Yucatán.

one-page preface that correlates its calendar-round dates with the long count. As in monumental inscriptions like those of Quiriguá and Palenque, the anchors are widely separated in time, with one of them reaching back into mythic time and the others staying within the frame of recorded Mayan history. The mythic long-count date is expressed as a negative number, $-6.2.0$, equivalent to $12.19.13.16.0$ in the era that ended with the placement of the Three Hearthstones on $13.0.0.0.0$. The historical date is $9.9.9.16.0$, equivalent to February 7, 623, which may be the date when Venus tables like

this one first came into use. If so, they were still a relatively recent invention in 682, when someone at Tikal used divinatory dates from such a table to create a time frame for a possible attack on Itzan.

The table provides three sets of dates from the 365-day calendar. One set belongs to the mythic past, and the other two belong to the historical era of the table's readers. In the case of historical dates, the need for a periodic change was created by a discrepancy between the idealized scheme of the table and the observable movements of Venus. The Mayan solution to the problem was to count one out of every sixty-one Venus periods as lasting only 580 days. This adjustment produced an average Venus period of 583.93 days, coming within a quarter of an hour of the 583.92 days measured by Western astronomers.

Each of the 584-day episodes in the story of Venus is divided into four intervals. For all but one of these intervals, the determining factors include synodic months and (in one case) a half-month. Venus is visible as the morning star for an average of 263 days, but this interval is rounded down to 236, equivalent to a combination of four 29-day months and four 30-day months. When Venus has completed its time as the morning star, it disappears for an average of 50 days, but this interval is rounded up to 90, equivalent to three 30-day synodic months. Venus then becomes the evening star for an average of 263 days, but this interval is rounded down to 250, equivalent to three 30-day months, five 29-day months, and one 15-day half month. At this point, the running total is 576 days, which is the nearest whole-day equivalent of nineteen and a half synodic months (575.85 days by Western measure). The remaining 8 days, which are assigned to the disappearance of Venus before it returns to its role as the morning star, match the average length of this interval as determined by Western observations.

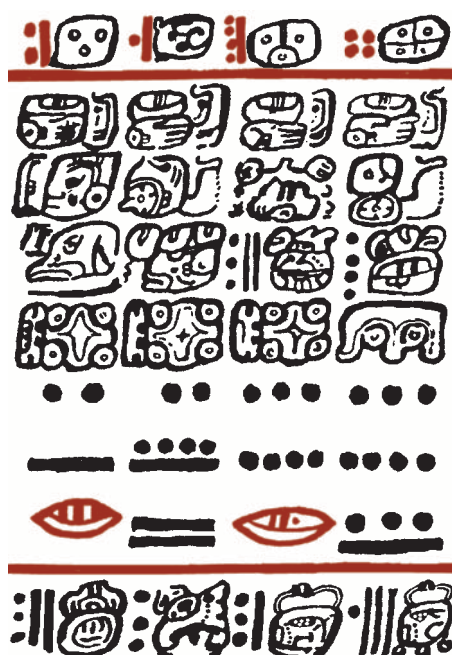


On 8 Wax, the Great Star is caught at the first corner by the Snail, when 236 days have passed, on 19 Song.

On 7 Death, the Great Star is caught where the day ends by the Scorpion, when 326 days have passed, on 4 Bat.

On 10 Wax, the Great Star is caught to the right by the Great Nibbler, when 576 days have passed, on 14 Drum.

On 5 Net, the Great Star is caught where the day begins by Death, when 584 days have passed, on 2 Song.



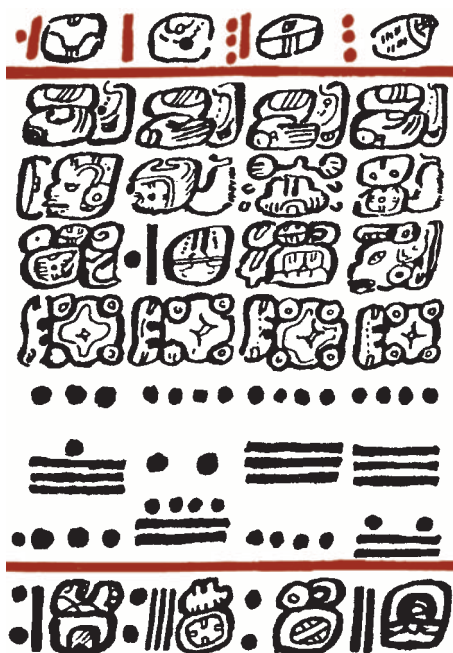
On 7 Lord, the Great Star is caught at the first corner by the Penis, when 820 days have passed, on 13 Green.

On 6 Foot, the Great Star is caught where the day ends by Akan, when 910 days have passed, on 3 Hawk.

On 9 Lord, the Great Star is caught to the right by 13 Sky Owl, when 1,160 days have passed, on 8 Well.

On 4 Sunk, the Great Star is caught where the day begins by Square Pawahtun, when 1,168 days have passed, on 16 Well.

Each of the table's five sections has four columns corresponding to the events that divide the 584-day period into four intervals. At the top of each column is a list of thirteen possible divinatory dates for the event in that column. The day name stays the same all the way down the list, but the day number runs through all thirteen possibilities. This results from the fact that the 2,920-day width of the table is evenly divisible by 20 but not by 13, which brings about a recurrence of the name but a change in the number. In the excerpt from the table on pages 206–208, the divinatory dates that run across the top are from the thirteenth row of the full table.

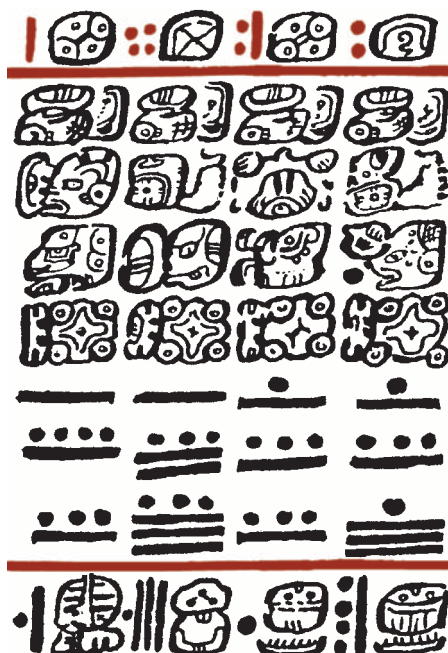


On 6 Net, the Great Star is caught at the first corner by Lord of the Sun, when 1,404 days have passed, on 7 Hunter.

On 5 Jaguar, the Great Star is caught where the day ends by the Standing Green Bird, when 1,494 days have passed, on 17 New Sun.

On 8 Net, the Great Star is caught to the right by Lord of the Night, when 1,744 days have passed, on 2 Sign.

On 3 Stairway, the Great Star is caught where the day begins by Lady of the House, when 1,752 days have passed, on 10 Sign.



On 5 Sunk, the Great Star is caught at the first corner by True Magician, when 1,988 days have passed, on 6 Yellow Sun.

On 4 Blade, the Great Star is caught where the day ends by Death, when 2,078 days have passed, on 16 Kiln.

On 7 Sunk, the Great Star is caught to the right by the Fire Scepter, when 2,328 days have passed, on 1 Point.

On 2 Wax, the Great Star is caught where the day begins by One Lord, when 2,336 days have passed, on 9 Point.

Running across the bottom row of the excerpt are dates from the 365-day calendar. They belong to the more recent of the two historical periods covered by the full table, where they also occupy the bottom row. In the first column of the excerpt, the calendar-round date produced by combining the information in the top and bottom rows is 8 Kib' 19 K'ayab', or "8 Wax 19 Song." In the last column, the combination is 1 Ajaw 3 Xul, or "1 Lord 3 Point." The best fit between these calendar-round dates and the actual movements of the Great Star runs from 11.4.14.9.16 to 11.5.2.0.0, or from August 23, 1317, to December 28, 1324.



On 4 Stairway, the Great Star is caught at the first corner by Corn, when 2,572 days have passed, at the seating of New Sun.

On 3 Wind, the Great Star is caught where the day ends by the Black Actor, when 2,662 days have passed, on 10 White.

On 6 Stairway, the Great Star is caught to the right by 7 Macaw, when 2,912 days have passed, on 15 Penance.

On 1 Lord, the Great Star is caught where the day begins by the Crocodile, when 2,920 days have passed, on 3 Point.

Between the top and bottom rows in the excerpt, the sequence of characters in each column is exactly the same as in the full table. In the second row, the verb for the catching of the Great Star is repeated in each column. The third row gives the direction in which the Great Star is located, the fourth row gives the names of the deities who catch it, and the fifth row repeats the name of the Great Star in each column. The wording follows the model of the caption for the pictures of Black Actor and Fire Scepter, except that no space is given to the naming of a target.

In the third row of the excerpt, the directional characters have a temporal meaning as well as a spatial one. The term for west (in the second column of each section) is *chik'in*, meaning the place where the sun or day (*k'in*) reaches its limit (*chi*). The term for east (in the fourth column) is *lak'in*, meaning the place of arrival of another (*lak'*) day (*k'in*). The other two directions (in the first and third columns) are *xaman*, meaning something like “first corner,” and *nojol*, “on the right hand,” meaning on the right side of a person facing east. These two terms, along with their equivalents in Mayan languages other than Yukatek, carry the sense of “north” and “south” when the reference is to the surface of the earth, but when the con-

text is astronomical, they carry a sense of “above” and “below.” The astronomical meaning is present in Classic texts and continues in many Mayan languages that are spoken today, but it has been lost in Yukatek. The logic of the sequence of directions in the table is that the Great Star, like the sun, must travel above the earth on its way from east to west during the day and below the earth on its way from west to east at night.

Many of the names of deities in the fourth row of the excerpt are familiar from the almanacs in earlier pages, and the ones that are different may simply be alternative ways of referring to individuals who have already been mentioned. As in the Almanac



Map 16. The Great Star just above the western horizon and sun just below it, on the evening of November 21, 1317 (Gregorian), in the latitude of Yucatán. The lines connect the stars of Scorpius.

of the Nineteen Gods (in chapter 15), there is a series of twenty events in which one of the deities appears twice, so that the number of distinct individuals is nineteen. Among the nineteen is Black Actor (in the second column of the last section), but instead of appearing in the east, as he does in the picture discussed earlier, he appears in the west. This difference is due to the fact that the picture illustrates an event that took place in the mythic past, whereas the names in the table are arranged to fit the era of its readers.

Below the row that names the Great Star are bar-and-dot numbers that give a running total for the intervals that lead from one column to the next. The number in the first column is 236, the number of days since the Great Star appeared in the east in the last column of the last page, at the end of the row of divinatory dates that precedes the one in the excerpt. In the fourth column, the total reaches the scale of a three-place number: 1.11.4, equivalent to $360 + 11 \times 20 + 4 = 584$ days, which completes one full Venus period and brings with it a new eastern appearance of the Great Star in this same column. In the twentieth column, the total reaches 8.2.0, equivalent to $8 \times 360 + 2 \times 20 + 0 = 2,920$ days, the length of five Venus periods.

The translation for each section of the table is presented in four paragraphs below it. Each successive paragraph corresponds to a different column, following the same order as the columns.

Little is known about the character named Yulum, or “Snail,” in the first column of the table’s first section. Second comes Sina’n, or “Scorpion,” who catches the Great Star in the west. This event took place on 11.4.14.14.6 7 Kimi 4 Sotz’, or “7 Death 4 Bat,” equivalent to November 21, 1317. In map 16, which shows a portion of the western horizon shortly after sunset on that day, the positions of the Great Star and the sun are

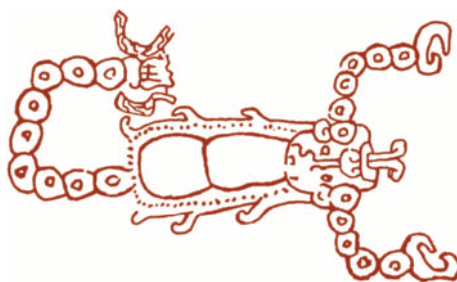


Fig. 56. The Mayan Scorpion constellation, corresponding to stars in Scorpius. The circular elements that compose the arms and tail are star signs. From the Madrid Codex.

marked by their respective characters. The stars connected by lines are those of Scorpius. Mayans saw a similar image in these stars, judging from pictures of their Scorpion in the Madrid Codex (see figure 56 for an example). The third column in the table's first section has Chak Pe', "Great (or Red) Nibbler," possibly referring to a rabbit. In the fourth column comes Kimil, or "Death," who is familiar from the lunar almanacs and located in Leo.

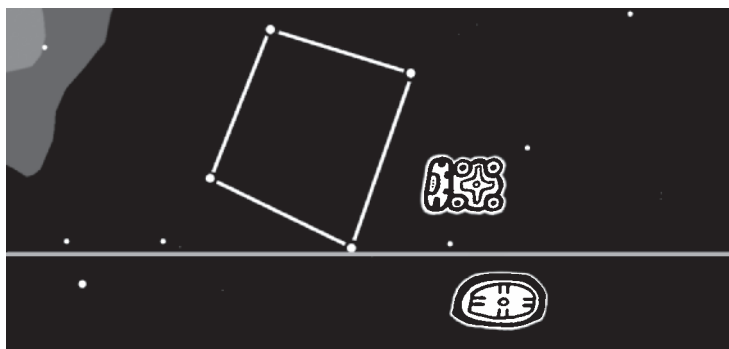
Leading off the second section is Kep, or "Penis," a character who lives in the vicinity of western Pisces. The moon almanacs put a bird named Bat Hawk in this location, whereas the Paris zodiac pictures an actual bat. The name in the Venus table is consistent with the characterization of bat deities in Classic vase paintings (see figure 57). After Penis comes Akan, a patron of alcoholic beverages we have already encountered at Palenque and in the Almanac of the Seven Gods. Coming third in the same section is 13 Kanak Mut, or "13 Sky Owl," one of two celestial owls. The present one is in the area of Pisces and Aquarius, not far from the bat, whereas the one encountered by Moon Woman was on the opposite side of the sky, in the area of Virgo and Corvus.

Occupying the last position in the second section is Pawahtun. The table gives his name as 4 Pawahtun, in which *kan* (the word for "four") can also be understood as "square." The date for this event is 11.4.17.2.8 4 Lamat 16 Ch'en, or "4 Sunk 16 Well," equivalent to March 12, 1320. The Great Star was near the Great Square of Pegasus (map 17), in almost the same position as that of Moon Woman when she was face-to-face with Pawahtun.

The first deity who catches the Great Star in the third section of the table is K'in Ajaw, or "Lord of the Sun." The implication is that the present-day sun once had a



Fig. 57. The monstrous Bat, also called Penis, who resides among stars in the vicinity of western Pisces. Detail of a painting on a Classic drinking vessel.



Map 17. The Great Star just above the eastern horizon and the sun just below it, on the morning of March 12, 1320. The lines connect the stars of the Great Square of Pegasus.

home among the fixed stars, or that a present-day star was once the sun. The location would be in Libra or among brighter stars in the same general area. Little is known of the next two characters beyond their names: Wak Yax Mut, or “Standing Green Bird,” and Ak’ab’ Ajaw, or “Lord of the Night.” Last comes Ix Ajaw Nah, or “Lady of the House,” located in Virgo. One of the lunar almanacs in the previous chapter puts her guardian—White Frog/Red Frog—in the same place. In her present role, she becomes a warrior like any other deity who catches the Great Star. She has a counterpart among the Mixtecs of Oaxaca, where a goddess with the calendrical name 8 Grass arms herself with a shield and uses weaving implements as weapons.

The fourth section opens with Itzamnaaj, or “True Magician,” familiar from the almanacs in the previous two chapters. The date for this event, located in the “above” direction, is 11.4.19.7.8 5 Lamat 6 K’ank’in, or “5 Sunk 6 Yellow Sun,” equivalent to June 10, 1322. In the middle of that day, the Great Star was a short distance from the stars that mark the home of True Magician, Aldeberan and the Hyades. Map 18, showing a segment of the sky overhead, is timed for the moment when the Great Star reached its highest point, which was almost exactly at the zenith. True Magician is followed by Death, the only god who makes two appearances in the table, first in the east and now in the west. Next comes Fire Scepter, who was hit by a dart during the era of the invention of the table but now gets his chance to shoot one. Last in the fourth section comes the hero Jun Ajaw, or “One Lord,” whose animal guardian is a vulture. He enters the story when the Great Star is in the vicinity of the King Vulture that resides among the stars of Taurus or perhaps Auriga, the same bird that took flight when Moon Woman followed these stars into the sky.

In the fifth and final section, the first character is one of two gods named Nal, or “Corn.” This Corn is the one we encountered at Palenque, located in the vicinity of Sagittarius and Capricornus, rather than the one in Gemini, whose stars followed the moon into the sky. Next, appearing in the west, comes Black Actor. The name of the third character has yet to yield a clear reading except for being prefaced with the number 7. He is probably the gamekeeper named elsewhere in the Dresden and Madrid codices as 7 Sip, and who is still known as Sip (without the number) among the



Map 18. The positions of the Great Star and the sun at noon on June 10, 1322. The lines connect the stars of the Hyades.



18 Thunderstorm

THE PAPER OF the Dresden Codex is folded into thirty-nine leaves, making seventy-eight pages. All the pages we have looked at so far are on the front side of the paper, the side that begins with the title page. Counting from that page, the section dealing with the Great Star ends on page 29. Of the ten remaining pages on the front side of the paper, nine are filled with tables that identify possible times for lunar and solar eclipses. The last page seems to be the first in what was once a longer section that tracked the rhythm of changes in human society by the measure of the *k'atun*, or “score of stones,” lasting 7,200 days.

Among the pages on the back side of the paper are four dealing with the 365-day year and two dealing with the planet Mars. The rest of these pages are filled mostly with almanacs that track the activities of a god (or a group of gods) named Chaak, or “Thunderstorm.” Like Pawahtun (or the four Pawahtuns) and the Bacabs, Thunderstorm can be thought of as four gods located in the four directions. Sometimes the writer mentions a fifth god, Yaaxal Chaak, or “Green Thunderstorm,” whose directional assignment is the middle of the world.

Thunderstorm continues to show up in the present day. The corn farmers of Yucatán hold a rain ceremony whose name, Ch’a Chaak, describes its purpose: “to bring Thunderstorm,” who will hopefully manifest as an actual thunderstorm. He is also among the most ancient of Mayan gods, making his first recognizable appearance during the Late Preclassic (400 B.C.E.–100 C.E.). One of his earliest images is carved on Stela 1 at the site of Izapa, on the Pacific coast of Chiapas (figure 58). In this representation, he already has the long nose that characterizes his later images. His snake belt is a sign of his ability to strike lightning.



Fig. 58. An early image of Chaak, or “Thunderstorm.” He has a fishnet in his hands and carries rain clouds in his backpack. From a Late Preclassic carving on Stela 1 at Izapa, in Chiapas.



Fig. 59. Thunderstorm, holding a fishnet, standing in a lagoon. From an almanac in the Dresden Codex.

Clouds billow from the top of the net bag he carries on his back, and rain falls from beneath it. With his hands, he lifts a fishnet, letting water run down through the mesh.

In a picture drawn more than a thousand years later (part of an almanac presented on pages 217–20), Thunderstorm stands in a lagoon that has fish in it, again holding a bowl-shaped net (figure 59). The almanacs often show him in watery places, and sometimes he strains rainwater through his fingers. At other times, he holds a sinuous object that represents a lightning bolt or beats a drum to make thunder. His favorite imple-

ment is a lightning-striking ax, but sometimes he holds a spear or an oar. In a number of pictures, he holds a tamale—or rather the logograph for *k'an*, the word for “tamale.” He may sit in the doorway of a house or on a scaffold, or in bushes or treetops, or on a mountaintop, or even on top of the vault of the sky.

The three Thunderstorm almanacs presented here run continuously across the bottom register of Dresden pages 62–72. In the first of these almanacs (pages 215–16) the narrative spans 65 days, with four possible starting dates. Thunderstorm moves from one direction to another, changing color as he does so. He is white at “the first corner” (north), black in the west, yellow “on the right” (south), and red in the east.

In effect, the first almanac is a schedule for the presentation of offerings to Thunderstorm. Appearing in the preface and in the illustrations are logographs (or details resembling logographs) that describe a variety of offerings. At the bottom of the list of dates in the preface is a jar topped with foam that is probably from one of several kinds of alcoholic beverages called *ki*, some of which contained honey (thus the reference to mead in the translation). Another kind of offering, described as “the blood of trees” in the translation, is indicated by a logograph that reads *k'ik'*, a term for “blood” that applies to the resin from which copal incense is made. The offerings described as “yellow, green” in the translation would be ears of corn.

Translations of the captions and of words embedded in the pictures are in roman type. Additional information derived from the pictures is in italics, along with day names that would be known to a diviner.



3 is the number of the starting days:

Jaguar

Pride

Net

Tribute.

Mead is his offering.



Here he is at the first corner:

White Thunderstorm Man.

16 days bring 6 Foot, Work, Lord, or Snake.

A turkey tamale is his offering.

He rows his canoe.



Here he is where the day ends:

Black Thunderstorm Man.

16 days bring 9 Death, Artisan, Wax, or Ceiba.

He sits over a well striking lightning.

The blood of a tree, an iguana tamale are his offerings.



Here he is on the right:

Yellow Thunderstorm Man.

16 days bring 12 *Wind, Deer, Stairway, or Earth.*

A fish tamale is his offering.

Yellow, green and the blood of trees are his offerings.

He beats a pottery drum.



Here he is where the day begins:

Red Thunderstorm Man.

17 days bring 3 *Pride, Net, Tribute, or Jaguar.*

Yellow, green and the blood of trees are his offerings.

He spears a deer.

The narrative of the next Thunderstorm almanac (pages 217–20) runs 117 days, with a preface that offers a choice among twenty starting dates. There are four columns of dates, each headed with a red number 11 and each containing five day names. The sequence of these dates runs down each column and then continues in the next column, and the interval between one date and the next is always 117 days.

The 117-day interval in this almanac is the synodic period of Mercury. For the naked-eye observer, the easiest way to measure this period would be to record the planet's return to its highest position above the horizon during its term as a morning star. Many such observations would be necessary, because the period is highly variable. Western astronomers have calculated a range from 111 to 122 days and an average of 115.88 days. From an observational standpoint, 116 days would have been a better choice for an idealized Mercury period than 117, but the larger number offers numerological



These are the starting days:

11

11

11

11

Lord

Snake

Foot

Work

Earth

Wind

Deer

Stairway

Jaguar

Pride

Net

Tribute

Artisan

Wax

Ceiba

Death

Sunk

Lack

Blade

Night



Perhaps Thunderstorm is there

in the red tree where the day begins.

13 days bring 11

Lack

Foot

Deer

Net

Ceiba.



Thunderstorm is there

in the barren white tree at the first corner.

13 more days bring 11

Death

Night

Lord

Earth

Jaguar.



Perhaps Thunderstorm is there
in the black tree where the day ends.

13 more days bring 11

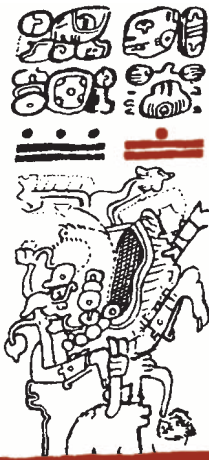
Pride

Wax

Lack

Foot

Deer.



Perhaps Thunderstorm is there
in the yellow tree on the right.

13 more days bring 11

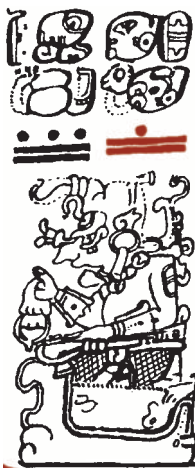
Stairway

Tribute

Death

Night

Lord.



Perhaps Thunderstorm is there
haunting a tidal lagoon.

13 more days bring 11

Snake

Wind

Pride

Wax

Lack.



Perhaps Thunderstorm is there
nesting in the sky.

13 more days bring 11



Blade

Work

Stairway

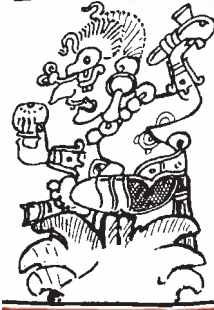
Tribute

Death.



Perhaps Thunderstorm is there
nesting at the top of a sprouting plant.

13 more days bring 11



Artisan

Sunk

Snake

Wind

Pride.



Perhaps Thunderstorm is there
in a hollowed-out tree, inside a new house.

13 more days bring 11



Net

Ceiba

Blade

Work

Stairway.



Perhaps Thunderstorm is there
in the thickets, Lord of the Arts.

13 more days bring 11

Earth

Jaguar

Artisan

Sunk

Snake.

advantages. For one thing, it is evenly divisible by 13 and thus results in a constant number coefficient for the starting dates. For another, an interval of $5 \times 117 = 585$ days brings five idealized Mercury periods within 1 day of equaling a single Venus period of 584 days. Using a Mercury period of 116 days would reduce the total for five periods to 580 days, an interval the Dresden Venus table assigns to only one out of every sixty-one Venus periods.

Over the short run, users of this almanac could have seen Mercury return to a previous moment in its period right on target or within a few days on either side of 117 days. Perhaps they were only looking for a way to schedule a series of ceremonies that coincided with a single Mercury period. If so, all they had to do was look for a starting date that would combine the number 11 with a desirable position for Mercury. If they wanted to bring Venus into play as well, they could have looked for a time when Mercury and Venus were appearing together as the morning or evening star and then counted five Mercury periods while tracking Venus through one period.

Because Mercury is very close to the sun and is much dimmer than Venus, it is clearly observable as a morning or evening star for only a few days at a time. Even on days when it does appear, it is visible for only a short time before the dawn light obliterates it or before it sets in the dusk light. It comes and goes far more swiftly than any other planet, which may explain its association with a deity who manifests as thunderstorms. Like the planet, Thunderstorm comes and goes swiftly.

The character that opens most of the captions in this almanac reads *u anwa*, in which *u* is a pronoun referring to Thunderstorm, *an* is a verb whose meanings include existing in a location, and the suffix *-wa* introduces an element of doubt, translated here as “perhaps.” Thus, the almanac treats the locations of Thunderstorm as possibilities rather than facts.



No, he's not inside the house.

Thunderstorm is conjuring *tamales* in the doorway.

13 Lord and 9 days bring 9 Tribute.



Perhaps he is the Lord of Growing Fruit *in the sky*.

Thunderstorm hits the mark *with his ax*.

11 more days bring 7 Lord.



Perhaps Thunderstorm is there
in a watery place.

A score of days brings 1 Lord.



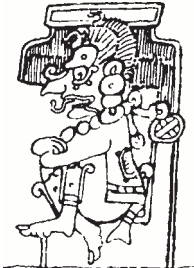
Perhaps Thunderstorm is there
compressing the air with his hands *on a mountaintop*.
10 more days bring 11 Foot.



Perhaps Thunderstorm is there
on the green earth, straining water through his fingers.
15 more days bring 13 Snake.



Perhaps Thunderstorm is there
in front of his own house *at the middle*.
9 more days bring 9 Jaguar.





Perhaps Thunderstorm is there
in the sky, weighing a surplus of *tamales*.
11 more days bring 7 Snake.



Perhaps Thunderstorm is there
stooping as he goes along. The rain has arrived.
A score of days brings 1 Snake.



Perhaps Thunderstorm is there
suddenly making things white.
10 more days bring 11 Work.



Perhaps Thunderstorm is there *in a well*
getting his hands wet day and night.
15 more days bring 13 Foot.



Perhaps Thunderstorm is there
on his rainmaking scaffold, in his bloodletting house.
9 more days bring 9 Portal.



Perhaps Thunderstorm is there
stopping to rest, Lord of the Stone *in the sky*.
11 more days bring 7 Foot.



Thunderstorm is there *under the sky*,
and the rain came day and night.
A score of days brings 1 Foot.



Perhaps Thunderstorm is there
in the valley, full of energy.
10 more days bring 11 Lord.



Perhaps Thunderstorm is there
getting his hands wet, stopping to rest *in a well*.
15 more days bring 13 Work.



Perhaps Thunderstorm is there
in the dry season, with cracks in his house *at the middle*.
9 more days bring 9 Net.



Perhaps Thunderstorm is there
stopping to rest *at the Owl's place* in the sky.
11 more days bring 7 Work.



Perhaps he is reaching somewhere very high,
a watery place, *during a solar or lunar eclipse*.
A score of days brings 1 Work.



Perhaps he really is there,
 stopping to rest on *Thunderstorm* Mountain.
 10 more days bring 11 Snake.



Perhaps *Thunderstorm* is there with a bowl of *tamales*
 at a place where the well is full of water.
 15 more days bring 13 Lord.



19 Diagrams of the Days

WHEN MAYANS USED graphic designs to represent the passage of time, they nearly always used tables of dates in which the events on a given row were different from one column to the next but the events in a given column were the same except for the dates on which they occurred. Most of the almanacs in Mayan books are abbreviated tables that leave it up to the reader to fill in the omitted details, using a single list of starting dates and a single row of interval numbers and nameless day numbers.

To read through all of a table's events in consecutive order is to move across the first row from left to right until all the columns are completed and then do the same thing on the second row, and so on. A reader who wishes to follow events back into the past can choose a starting point and then move leftward through the rows and upward through the columns. Another option is to study the pattern of dates for a particular kind of event, reading upward or downward through a given column. Pursued far enough, any of these options eventually leads the reader to a point at which the same event takes place on the same date. At the scale of the full table, the event in the last column of the last row is followed by the event in the first column of the first row, and so on.

The movements made by a person writing or reading a table resemble those of a weaver stringing a loom or crossing warp threads with weft threads, or those of a composer writing a piano score that consists of a series of chords. None of the movements made in the writing and reading of a table, the weaving and unraveling of a textile, or the composition and performance of a musical score is circular. Even so, the literature on Mayan thought is filled with such terms as "cycle," "cyclical time," and even "wheel." Textbooks and reference works often illustrate the workings of Mayan calendars with intermeshing cogwheels: a small one for the thirteen day numbers, a somewhat larger one for the twenty day names, and a much larger one for the 365-day year. Such an image certainly demonstrates the influence of the mechanical clock on the Western imagination of time, but it tells us nothing at all about the Mayan imagination.

Western thinkers have long been in the habit of locating non-Western others, including Mayans, in the conservative world of "cyclical time," as contrasted with the progressive world of "linear time." It is therefore ironic that the argument for Mayan cyclical time should involve such a strongly Western image as that of a mechanism with spinning cogwheels. But not everyone who desires a circular image of Mayan time is satisfied with this one. Some have sought such an image within Mayan culture itself. The problem is that circles are limited to the alphabetic documents of colonial

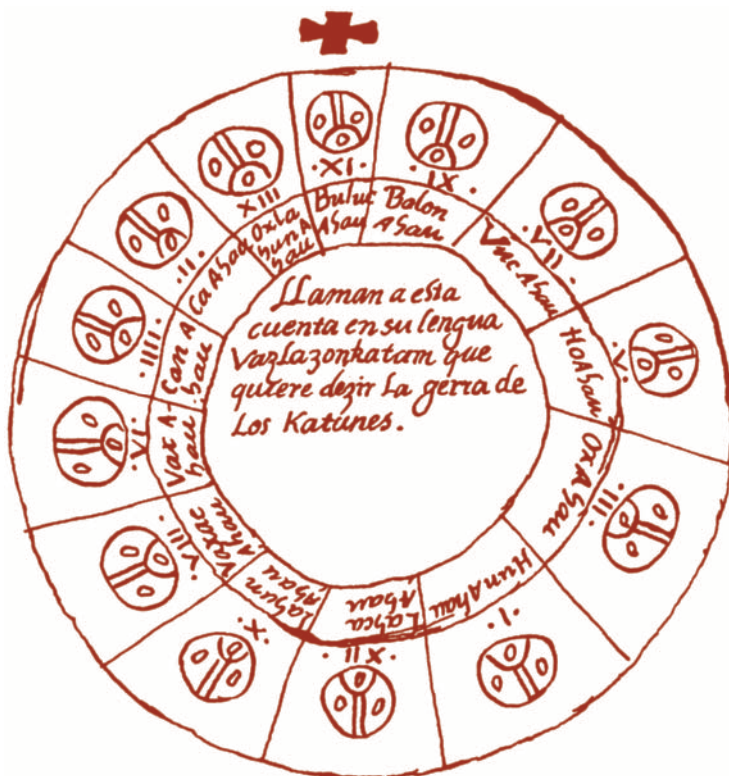


Fig. 60. A diagram of the thirteen kinds of *k'atun*, or "score of stones," running clockwise through the divinatory dates on which each one ends. The cross at the top, which marks the east, anchors time in space. From Diego de Landa's *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán*.

Yucatán. They appear in the Chilam Balam books from the towns of Kaua and Chumayel and in Diego de Landa's *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán*.

Each of the circular diagrams in colonial documents illustrates the relationship among thirteen consecutive periods of time of the kind called *k'atun*, or "score of stones," lasting $20 \times 360 = 7,200$ days. Each score of stones is named for the divinatory date on which it ends, which is always Ajaw, or "Lord," but with a number prefix that runs through all thirteen possibilities. The sequence begins with 11 Lord, followed by 9, 7, 5, 3, 1, 12, 10, 8, 6, 4, 2, and 13 before the numbers begin to repeat. The circles have thirteen segments corresponding to the thirteen numbers, with the last score of stones (13 Lord) followed by the first score (11 Lord) at the top.

Those who use these diagrams to exemplify Mayan thought invariably describe them as "*k'atun* wheels." The most frequently reproduced example is the one in figure 60, from Landa's *Relación*. Written in each of the outer segments is the day sign for Ajaw, with a roman numeral underneath. The inner segments contain the Yucatek numbers and names for the same dates, rendered in alphabetic writing. In the center of the circle, Landa wrote a caption in Spanish that says, "In their language they call this account *wajlazonkatam*, which means 'the rotation of the katuns.'" After correcting

for Landa's imprecise ear and modernizing his spelling, the Yukatek term for this diagram comes out as *wasak'om k'atun*, which means that a score of stones "returns" like a person coming back from a journey, or like a road that turns back toward its starting point. In other words, the circle is not a wheel that revolves but a curved pathway to be followed.

The cross at the top of the circle, above the position of 11 Lord, marks not only the starting point of the journey but also the direction of the rising sun. The Chilam Balam books label all four directions in the circles, with east at the top. So all of these circles are diagrams of space as well as time. They are motionless maps, resting flat on the surface of the earth, and the only thing that moves is the eye of the reader or the feet of the traveler.

Those who are not satisfied with the time circles constructed during the colonial period have kept an eye out for Pre-Columbian examples. So far, they can do no better than point to a carved stone turtle from the Late Postclassic period, excavated at Mayapán (figure 61). A series of thirteen Ajaw day signs is carved around the margin of its carapace. Though the signs are not accompanied by numbers, they must have been intended to signify a series of thirteen scores of stones, each bearing a different number. The associa-



Fig. 61. Turtle with thirteen Ajaw signs carved around the edge of its carapace, standing for thirteen periods lasting a score of stones each. The turtle's head was probably meant to face east. Late Postclassic stone carving from Mayapán, in Yucatán.

tion between turtles and the number thirteen has a basis in natural history, though it is the large laminae that compose the dome of the carapace that number thirteen rather than the small ones on the margins. One thing turtles do *not* do is spin their shells around an axis. Even so, the stone turtle has been labeled a "k'atun wheel."

Mayans conceived the earth as resting on the back of an aquatic creature that had risen to the surface, envisioned as a turtle or crocodile. It therefore seems likely that the stone turtle, like the circles drawn in documents, was intended as a diagram of space as well as time. Information about the turtle's orientation when it was found is not available, but a good guess is that its head was toward the east. In the circle in the Chilam Balam book from Chumayel, the succession of thirteen segments is interrupted between 13 Lord and 11 Lord by an extra segment labeled *ti lik'in waye*, "east is this way."

If we let go of the Western preference for circles but hold on to the idea that some Mayans of the past visualized a period of time as a continuous path that returns to its starting point, we are led to a diagram that is far more complex than the arcs or circles that represent scores of stones, on pages 75–76 of the Madrid Codex. It fills an area that is not circular, but square (figure 62). Written counterclockwise around the square are rows of dots, punctuated by divinatory dates, that stand for a series of days. Time runs parallel to a side for 13 days and then, as it comes to a corner, turns diagonally inward

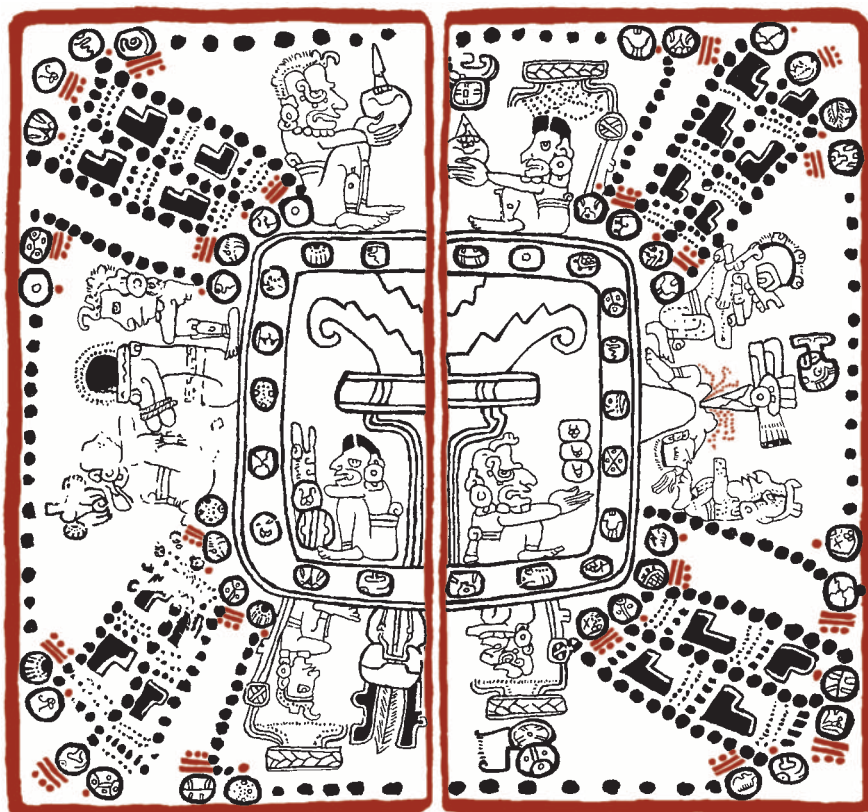
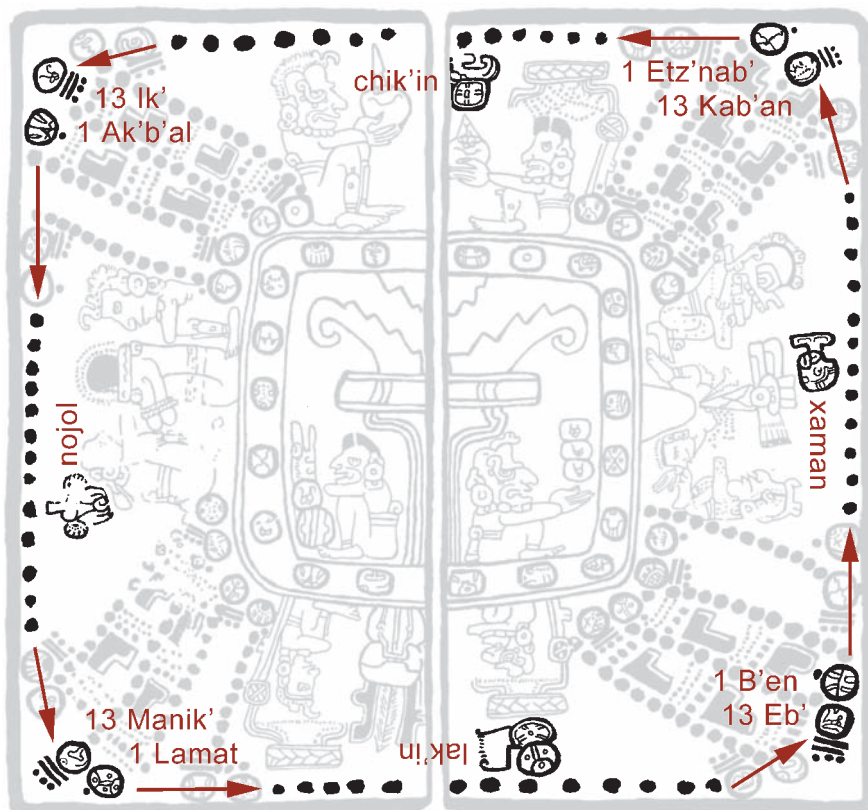


Fig. 62. Diagram of time and space from the Madrid Codex, filling two pages. The east side of the diagram is the bottom one, and the direction of motion in time and space is counterclockwise.

for 13 days, then outward for 13, then inward for another 13, and outward for 13 more, reaching a total of 65 days before it runs along a side again. The remaining three sides and three corners raise the total to the full 260 days of the divinatory calendar. The repeated use of the sign shown at right in the spaces between diagonal rows confirms that the dots were conceived as a roadway on the surface of the earth. This is a stylized human footprint that serves as a logograph for *b'e*, meaning “road.”

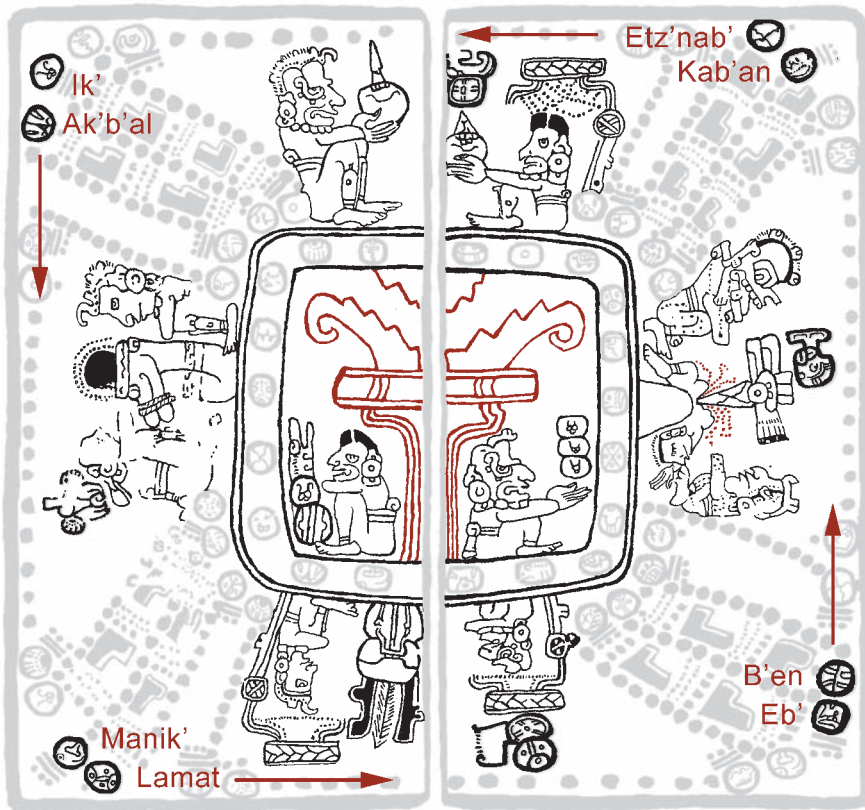


We can read the movement of time in the diagram in at least four ways, mapped in the illustrations on the pages that follow. The first reading (page 233) takes into account all of the dates connected by dots to come up with a span of 260 days. The second reading (page 234) combines dates and dots from the four corners and four sides of the diagram to account for 52 years of 365 days each. The third reading (page 235) divides years into four types according to the day names that mark their boundaries, and the pictures on the four sides of the diagram show the appropriate rituals for each type of year. In the fourth reading (page 236), the focus shifts to the day names that fill the border of the smaller square within the larger one. These names are organized in groups of five that reflect the structure of the Dresden Venus table.



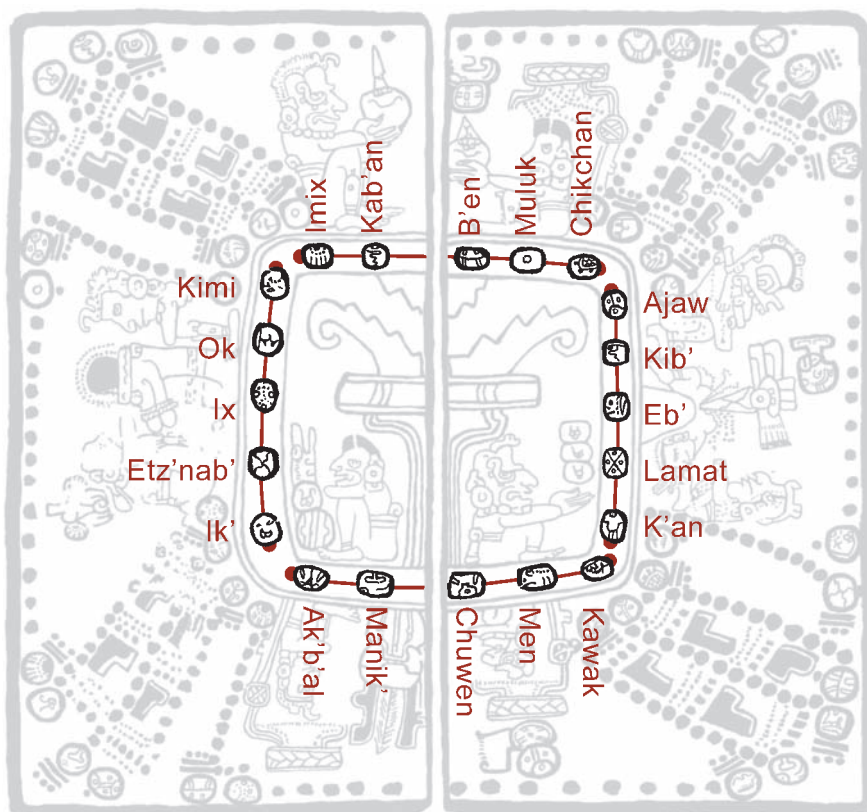
The Road of 52 Years

At each of the outer corners of the diagram is a pair of divinatorial dates (in black with red transcriptions) that can be read as corresponding to the last day of an old year of 365 days and the first day of a new one. Thirteen years separate each pair of dates from the next, signified by the 13 dots (in black) that run along each side of the diagram (one dot is missing on the right side). A transition between years takes place at the upper right corner on 13 Kab'an and 1 Etz'nab', or "13 Earth and 1 Blade," and is followed, 13 years later, by a transition that takes place at the upper left corner on 13 Ik' and 1 Ak'b'al, or "13 Wind and 1 Night," and so on. The completion of all four sides of the diagram takes 52 years.



The Road of the Four Kinds of Year

The day names at the four corners mark transitions between years, recurring every four years with variable number prefixes. In a year that begins on B'en, or "Lack," Death and Split Down the Middle receive a human sacrifice in the north (to the right). In the next year, which begins on Etz'nab', or "Blade," True Magician and Moon Woman (who is seated in a temple) receive offerings in the west (at the top). Next, in a year beginning on Ak'b'al, or "Night," two deities of uncertain identity receive a bound prisoner in the south. And then, when the year begins on Lamat, or "Sunk," two unidentified deities (both seated in temples) receive a stack of offerings in the east. At the center, which may pertain to all years, is a flaming and smoking ceramic incense burner (in red), flanked by True Magician and Moon Woman.



Twenty Day Names Divided by Four

The day names in each series of five (joined by a red line) are spaced at four-day intervals. The last day in a series returns the count to its starting point, because $4 \times 5 = 20$. In the series at right, which reads upward, the days are those of possible eastern appearances of the Great Star, listed in the same order as in the Dresden Venus table: K'an, Lamat, Eb', Kib', Ajaw, or "Net, Sunk, Stairway, Wax, Lord." The days in the series at left, which reads downward, are those of possible western appearances of the Great Star, again following the order of the table: Kimi, Ok, Ix, Etz'nab', Ik', or "Death, Foot, Jaguar, Blade, Wind." The other two series, which read from right to left across the top and left to right across the bottom, account for the remaining ten names but have no known astronomical meaning.



PART TWO

This page intentionally left blank



20 The Alphabet Arrives in the Lowlands

DURING A SCORE of stones named 2 Lord, beginning in 1500 and ending in 1520, foreigners from across the Atlantic began to appear in the Mayan world. In 1502, on his fourth and final voyage, Cristóbal Colón had a peaceful encounter with a large Mayan trading canoe in the Gulf of Honduras. In 1511, eleven shipwrecked Spanish sailors drifted ashore on the east coast of Yucatán. Five of them were sacrificed by a local lord, and the other six escaped into a neighboring kingdom, only to be enslaved. When an opportunity to rejoin their countrymen arose in 1519, only two of the sailors were still alive. Gerónimo de Aguilar became an interpreter for Hernán Cortés, but Gonzalo de Guerrero chose to remain in the town of Chetumal, which is now the capital of the Mexican state of Quintana Roo. By this time, he had a family there, having married the daughter of Nachan Kan, the local ruler.

For most of the communities in Yucatán, the first experience of the European presence took the form of a smallpox epidemic. It began, according to Mayan accounts, in 1513. The virus might have been carried by one of the shipwrecked sailors, or it might have spread overland from the Spaniards who had established a colony in Darien, in present-day Panama.

In 1517, an expedition led by Francisco Hernández de Córdoba sailed from Cuba and arrived at the northeastern tip of Yucatán. When Córdoba came ashore and encountered some Mayan fishermen, he attempted to learn the name of the place from them by speaking Spanish and gesturing. They understood him to be pointing to nearby houses and said *kotoch*, which means “our houses.” As a result, he wrote the name of the place as “Cabo Catoche,” which is what it is still called on maps. When he continued his inquiry, thinking to learn something about the land that lay beyond the shore, he heard the fishermen say something he wrote down as “Yucatán.” What they actually said was *k’i ut’an*, which means, “The way he talks is funny.”

From Cabo Catoche, the expedition continued westward and then southward along the Gulf coast of Yucatán as far as a town whose local name became Champotón in Spanish accounts. When the Spaniards came ashore, they met with military resistance, and despite their guns and swords, they were defeated and driven away. Hernández de Córdoba sailed back to Cuba, where he died of the multiple wounds he had received at Champotón.

In 1518, the expedition of Juan de Grijalva set sail from Cuba, first landing on the island of Kusamil, or “Place of Swallows,” which became Cozumel in Spanish accounts. From there, he sailed down the east coast of Yucatán, catching sight of several towns

ruins. In 1546, an independence movement broke out among the kingdoms on the east side of the peninsula. The invaders counted their defeat of the rebels as the event that completed the conquest, which had taken almost twenty years.

NACHI COCOM GIVES DIEGO DE LANDA A WRITING LESSON

Among the early missionaries to arrive in the province of Yucatán was Diego de Landa, a Franciscan who came in 1549. In Sotutá, he learned a great deal about Mayan history and customs in his conversations with Nachi Cocom, who had recently been baptized with the name Juan. In his *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán*, Landa writes that “Don Juan Cocom was a man of great reputation” and “great discernment” who was “well acquainted with native matters.” Cocom told him “many facts concerning antiquities” and showed him “a book which had belonged to his grandfather.” Nevertheless, scholars have long been in the habit of attributing Landa’s knowledge of Mayan history, culture, and writing to Gaspar Antonio Chi, whom he never so much as mentions. Chi was a Xiu from Maní who served as an interpreter for the provincial government.

The book Cocom showed to Landa was bound between two boards that had been stained with verdigris to keep fungus and insects away. Between them was a single long strip of paper, folded back and forth to make pages that were one handbreadth wide and two handbreadths high by Landa’s measure. On one of these pages he saw a picture of a “large deer.” This description is puzzling, because the images on a given page in a Mayan book are neither drawn to scale nor in perspective. There are larger and smaller *images* of deer, but there is no way to tell the image of a large deer from that of a small deer. Figure 63 shows an excerpt from a section of the Madrid Codex that deals with the trapping of deer. In the middle register is a large picture of the ventral side of a male deer, and the bottom register has two small pictures of trapped deer whose forelegs were hoisted off the ground by bent saplings when they stepped into nooses.

As with so many other things Landa says about Mayan books and writing, the best



Fig. 63. A page from the Madrid Codex that deals with the trapping of deer. In the lowest of the three registers are two deer that have sprung traps, leaving them with their forelegs hoisted off the ground.

way to understand his “large deer” is to reconstruct his conversation with Cocom, working backward from his account of what Cocom said. Landa may have pointed to a particular picture of a deer and said something like, “Why is this one so large?” He describes Cocom’s response this way: “His grandfather had told him that when large deer of this kind came into that country,” meaning the cows that Spaniards brought with them, “the worship of the gods would cease.” Later it came to light that Cocom was continuing Mayan religious practices in secret at this time, so he may have invented his interpretation of the image of the deer in order to throw Landa off the track. At the same time, such an interpretation would have appealed to Landa’s sense of pride. The early missionaries were tireless seekers after evidence that their arrival in the New World had been prophesied, just as the arrival of the Messiah in Palestine had been prophesied in the Old Testament.

The system of writing used in the book seemed ponderous to Landa. Most of the characters were more complicated than letters of the alphabet, and they were far greater in number. Even so, he decided to find out how the spelling might go for some of the Mayan words he had learned. Perhaps because he had seen pictures of trapped deer in Cocom’s book, the first word he thought of was *le*, the term for “noose.” This was an ominous choice, because he would later conduct Inquisition trials in which the primary torture consisted in closing nooses around the wrists of Mayan witnesses and then hoisting them off the ground with their feet dangling.

Landa assumed from the start that he was dealing with an alphabetic writing system, but he could not understand why the results of his inquiry were so complicated. When he asked for the spelling of *le*, he made Cocom “understand that there are two letters,” but here is what Cocom wrote (at right). As we now know, the first and third signs stand for the syllable *e*, and the second and fourth stand for the syllable *le*. To understand why Cocom wrote four signs, we must reconstruct Landa’s side of the conversation. When Landa asked for two letters, he must have gone on to spell the word, naming its letters in Spanish as “ele, e” and then pronouncing the word, saying “le.” Cocom heard four syllables—*e*, *le*, *e*, *le*— and wrote exactly what he heard.



Landa interpreted the second and third signs as the two letters he had expected, *l* and *e*. He imagined that the extra *e* at the beginning was an indication of the breathiness with which the *l* sound is pronounced in Mayan, a sort of hissing in which he thought he heard a faint foretaste of the vowel that follows *l* in *le*. But he still had one more sign to account for, the fourth one. Not realizing that it was the same as the second sign, he must have entered into an exchange that went something like this:

“But what’s this?” Landa asked, pointing to the fourth sign.

“Well, that is *le*,” Cocom replied.

“All by itself?” Landa asked.

“Yes,” said Cocom.

From this response, Landa concluded that it must be a Mayan custom to follow the spelling of the individual sounds of a word with a final character that sums everything up. He could have found out, had he asked, that the second and fourth signs were the same, though they looked slightly different. But it seems that his discomfort with casting himself in the role of student was such that he preferred the invention of a private theory about the information he had been given to the embarrassment of seeming to be a slow learner.

Cocom, on his side, must have been wondering what Landa's problem was. Hadn't he given the Spaniard a spelling that used only two different "letters"? Not that anyone but him would ever say something like *ele e le*, which was nonsense—unless he actually meant to be saying what it almost sounded like he was saying, "testicle blade noose"

Still hoping for simplicity, Landa chose another monosyllabic word for the next step in his writing lesson. He asked Cocom to spell *ha*, the word for "water," and he demanded just two letters again, naming them in Spanish as "ache, a," and then saying "ha." By now Cocom understood that Landa really wanted two "letters" and two only, even though he had once again pronounced four syllables. Cocom's solution to this problem was to omit one syllable and write *ache ha* in two parts (at right). In the first part, the left half is a sign for the syllable *a* and the right half is a sign for *che*, and the separate sign that follows is for *ha*. Landa mistakenly labeled the entire first part as "a," but he correctly labeled the second part as "ha." As in the case of the "e" before "le," it seemed to him that this "a" before "ha" must call for a breathy pronunciation of the consonant in *ha*.



Again, Cocom must have wondered whether Landa had any idea what he was saying when he asked that his statements be written down. It happens that *ache* is a word and that *ache ha*, if anyone ever said such a thing, would mean "Hello, water."

Now Landa decided to ask Cocom to write something longer, and while he was at it he may have tried to explain what a "sentence" was. In any case, he left the choice of words up to Cocom, and the result was this sentence:



The first sign stands for the syllable *ma*, which in this context is a word that makes the sentence negative. Then comes *in*, meaning the pronoun "I," spelled with two signs. The first one is for *i* and the second for *ne*, with the context signaling that the final *e* is not pronounced. The last two signs, standing for *k'a* and *ti*, spell the verb *k'ati*, "to want." *Ma in k'ati* is the result, meaning, "I don't want to."

Landa transcribed this entire sentence into alphabetic writing as if it were a single word, but he wrote down a correct translation. At this point in the interview, there may have been a moment of silence while he struggled with the thought that Cocom might have intended this sentence to send a message. Whether or not he was troubled by this possibility, he decided to press on, but with another change in his line of ques-



tioning. His new project was to elicit what he called the Mayan “abecedario,” or ABCs, letter by letter. When he asked for the letter *a*, he got three versions (at left). We know now that all of these signs represent the syllable *a*. The first one is the same sign Cocom used in his spelling of *ache*.

When Landa asked for the next letter, whose name is pronounced “be” in Spanish, he got two versions (at right). Both of these signs



stand for the syllable *b'e*, and the first one happens to be ideographic.

The word for “road” is *b'e*, and this sign is crossed by a road with a footprint on it. It is a shorthand footprint with only three dots for the toes, like the footprints in the diagram of time in chapter 19. But Landa was not interested in what these signs looked like. He only wanted to know how they matched up with the letters of his alphabet, which don’t look like anything except themselves. Once he had his *b'e*, or rather two of them, he moved on, not realizing he was dealing with signs for syllables and should ask for *b'a*, *b'i*, *b'o*, and *b'u*.



Because Landa was from Castile, he would have sounded as though he had a lisp when he asked for “c,” saying “the” rather than “se.” Mayan languages have no “th” sound, but Cocom came as close as he could (at left). Landa labeled this sign as “c,” but the syllable it stands for has turned out to be *tze*.

By the time they got to *z*, Cocom was probably at the end of his patience. The name of this letter, in Landa’s pronunciation, would have come out as “theta.” So Cocom heard two syllables, not one, with a “th” sound into the bargain. Here is what he wrote in response (at right). No one, in all the time since then, has been able to figure out what he meant by this.



ACTS OF FAITH

The next score of stones, named 9 Lord, began during 1559 and ended during 1579. Landa was becoming increasingly alarmed by rumors of covert activities among the Christian converts of Yucatán, who were said to be performing indigenous religious rites that included human sacrifice. In 1562, he and his fellow Franciscans conducted a series of trials in the name of the Holy Office of the Inquisition, though they had not been authorized to do so. They tortured 4,549 witnesses, of whom 157 died as a result and 32 ended up maimed or crippled. Another 13 individuals committed suicide before they could be arrested, and 18 others disappeared under circumstances that pointed to suicide. Two suspects who were already incarcerated in a monastery managed to end their lives by striking themselves in the throat with a stone, as if to make doubly sure of not having to speak. And finally, 140 persons were convicted posthumously, resulting in the disinterment and cremation of their remains.

21 The Books of Chilam Balam

WHILE IT IS TRUE that the early missionaries in Yucatán and elsewhere in the Mayan world sought to replace the Mayan script with the roman alphabet, they did not seek to replace Mayan languages with Spanish. Working in collaboration with native speakers, they adapted the alphabet to the sounds of those languages and produced grammars and dictionaries, along with translations of sermons, prayers, catechisms, and confessionals. Each parish had a native *maestro cantor*, or “choirmaster,” whose duties included keeping the parish records, teaching alphabetic writing, and selecting and training scribes. Choirmasters were recruited from high-ranking families, and their pupils were boys from such families.

Many of the choirmasters were individuals who had served as shaman-priests in the older religion, or who would have been selected for such roles. Time and again they were discovered to be serving both religions, keeping “idols” in their schoolhouses and possessing manuscripts that were not in conformity with church doctrine. The Madrid Codex was confiscated from a choirmaster, and around that same time (the early seventeenth century) a copybook was taken from another choirmaster when it was found to contain an alphabetic version of a Mayan story of how the world began.

The principal surviving sources of works by the indigenous authors of colonial Yucatán are the books named for the Chilam Balam, or “Jaguar Spokesman,” a Mayan prophet who lived in the period just before and just after the Spanish invasion. Each of the nine surviving books is written in the alphabet on paper of European manufacture, and each is named for the town where it was acquired by a collector or where the original still resides. The books that have received the most attention are those of Maní, Chumayel, Tizimín, and Kaua.

The Chilam Balam books have overlapping contents, but each one has some features that are unique. All of the books are anthologies of works that were originally committed to alphabetic writing by different authors at different times. Their contents include origin stories, prophecies, song texts, rituals, almanacs, medical treatises, chronicles, and detailed accounts of historical events. Also included are translations of Spanish catechisms and astrological treatises, together with diagrams from Spanish works that deal with such topics as the scientific explanation of eclipses and the art of summoning spirits with magical diagrams.

In most Chilam Balam books, the only Mayan sign that appears within the otherwise alphabetic text is the one for the day name Lord (*Ajaw*), but the book from Maní has passages that include signs for all twenty day names. The signs have been re-

Fig. 64. The names of five consecutive days—K'an, Chikchan, Kimi, Manik', and Lamat—as they are written in the Dresden Codex (at left) and in the Chilam Balam books of Maní (in the middle) and Chumayel (right).



designed, as can be seen from a comparison with the versions in the Dresden Codex (figure 64). The Maní forms have rectangular frames like the ones that enclose the day names in some Aztec and Mixtec books. They have also been made more abstract, perhaps in response to the lack of imagery in the letters of the alphabet. But each of them (including the ones not pictured here) retains fea-

tures that distinguish the Dresden day signs from one another, and in that sense, they remain legible from the perspective of the original writing system. There may well have been other experiments in the redesigning of Mayan signs, but they have yet to come to light.

Some of the writings incorporated in the Chilam Balam books may date as early as the sixteenth century, but most of them are probably later. The surviving books are the end products of a long process of copying and recopying. The earliest manuscripts date from the late seventeenth century, but most date from the eighteenth century. The excerpts presented below and in the next two chapters come from the Chumayel manuscript. Nearly everything in its pages is written in the hand of Don Juan Josef Hoil, who signed and dated his work in 1782. Minor additions appear in other hands, some of them on a page he left blank, that date as late as 1838.

THE RECORD OF EACH SCORE OF STONES

Among the contents of the Chumayel manuscript are five chronicles that organize events according to the score of stones in which they occurred or were predicted to occur. Each score is named for the date of its completion, as reckoned by the 260-day divinatory calendar. As we have seen in previous chapters, the final day name is always Ajaw, or "Lord," but with a changing number. All of these chronicles express the notion that events occurring during scores whose names have the same number may be similar (but not identical). Thus, a relatively recent event may be read as having been prefigured by an event in the more distant past, or it may be read as prefiguring a future event. In two of the chronicles, the entry for a given score of stones combines an account of the past with a prophecy. In the other three chronicles, the focus is on

the rhythm of past events, leaving it up to the reader to project that rhythm into the future.

The regularities in these chronicles appear to be the result of a backward projection of a theory of history that developed during the colonial period. Authors of the Classic period certainly looked for ways to connect the actions of living rulers to those of their human and divine predecessors, but they did not create narratives in which the major events in the history of a kingdom occurred at regular intervals or were projected into the future by means of such intervals. Moreover, the authors of the chronicles written during the colonial period were familiar with the prophetic theory of history that was brought to Yucatán by Christian missionaries. When we consider their works in the light of these circumstances, they have the look of an experiment. The authors were not simply preserving their history against the possibility of loss but were giving it a prophetic reinterpretation.

The fine point here, easy to miss if we simply look for evidence of Christian “influence,” is that the authors of these chronicles did not remake their own history into a subset of the master narrative of the Christian invaders. They did reexamine prior history for a pattern of destiny, but in so doing, they used Mayan rather than Christian ways of measuring time. And when they reached the point in their narratives where the invaders arrived, they treated the Christian calendar as an *addition* to their own rather than as a *substitute* for it.

The chronicle presented here (from pages 74–77 of the Chumayel manuscript) is the first of the three that focus on the past. Its main subject is the history of the Itza people, which it traces through four full groups of thirteen score stones each and then continues for seven score more. The entry for the first score of stones named 13 Lord states that “the mat was put in order,” referring to the fact that in matters of ceremony, 13 Lord was reckoned as completing a series of thirteen score stones. The twelve boundaries separating those scores were thought of as the twelve *wutz’*, or “folds,” in a mat like the one in figure 65. Such a mat is made by plaiting two strips of cattail leaf, with the cut ends of the strips sticking out at the corners. Each of the long sides of the mat has four folds and each of the short sides has two, making a total of twelve. The coming of a new set of thirteen score stones, beginning with 11 Lord, brought the construction of a new mat of twelve folds. Several of the major events in the present chronicle are described as being separated by the folding of thirteen score stones, but in these

cases, the change from one set of folds to another takes place between 8 Lord and 6 Lord rather than between 13 Lord and 11 Lord.

The score that opens the chronicle, ending on 6 Lord, is described as the one in which Chi’ch’e’n Itza, or “Mouth of the Well,” was founded. It correlates with a period running from December 435 to August 455 on the Christian calendar, but the authors of these chronicles

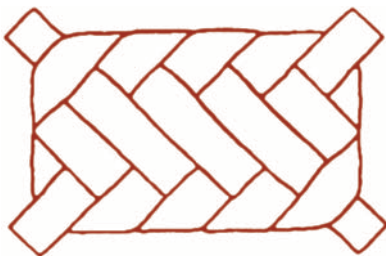


Fig. 65. Mat with twelve folds, made from two strips of cattail leaf.

stances of 2 Lord lack events, but now it becomes the score that brings *noj k'ak'il*, the “great fire” or “great fever,” which was smallpox. By Christian reckoning, this score began in 1500 and ended in 1520.

THE DEATH OF THE RAIN PRIEST

A score named 13 Lord comes next, bringing the death of Napot Xiu, a rain priest. According to Landa, he was the leader of a group of Xiu pilgrims who were seeking to end a drought by making sacrifices at Mouth of the Well. To do so, they needed to pass through Itza territory, and they were offered hospitality by the Cocoms, who seemed to be setting past differences aside. But once Napot Xiu and his party were all inside the house that was opened to them, they suffered the same fate as Beowulf and his companions. The house was torched, and everyone in it was killed. Landa refrains from naming the man who played host to the Xius, but he was none other than Nachi (later Juan) Cocom. Whether or not the guests knew the identity of their host, they were dealing with a grandson of the Cocom lord whose brothers had been killed by the Xius at Mayapán.

The entry for 13 Lord includes a detailed explanation of the date of the death of Napot Xiu. First, the chronicler says that it occurred during the sixth year of 13 Lord. Counting the 365-day year that was already under way when that score of stones began, and taking into account the fact that the dates in the twenty-day periods of years were counted from one to twenty (rather than from zero to nineteen) at this time, the sixth year would have begun on 9 Night 1 Mat (9 Ak'b'al 1 Pop), July 21, 1525, on the Julian calendar then in use by Europeans. Next, the chronicler tells us that the divinatory date 4 Net (4 K'at) arrived when the first of that year's scores of days had been completed, meaning that the calendar-round date now stood at 4 Net 1 Sign (4 K'at 1 Wo). Then, after a digression concerning the violence of the year that was under way, he returns to the question of dating by moving ahead to the next score of days after the one named Sign, mentioning 1 Hunter (1 Sip). After this step, he puts the number of completed scores of days at three, starting from 1 Sign, which brings the count to the last day in the score named Bat (Sotz'). He mentions only the divinatory part of that date, but the full calendar-round date would have been 9 Ceiba 20 Bat (9 Imix 20 Sotz'), equivalent to October 7, 1525. That was the day when Napot Xiu died.

Up to this point, the entry for 13 Lord is quite precise in its time reckoning. But it ends with a statement that must have been added by someone who lacked an understanding of calendars (whether Mayan or European) and of arabic numerals. The *anno Domini* of the death, according to this addition, was “158.”

The next score of stones, 11 Lord, which ran from 1539 to 1559, brings the arrival of the *k'ul winikob'*, or “godly people,” possibly referring to the Franciscan missionaries who began arriving in the 1540s. But the rest of the entry appears to refer to the impact of Spanish invasion in general, which was “ruinous.” The statement that the condi-

Whak lay uxocan Katuronob: uch ci uchi tahat uchi
cheen yha: uchilae: lay sibar tica6 lae: u
chebal yohel tabal tumen hij mac yolahi yohel
ta uxocoi Katuron lae

VI Vac ahau uch ci uchi tahat uchi cheen yha

III Can ahau lae

II Cabil ahau

XIII Oxlahun ahau hol ci pop

XI Buluc ahau

IX Bolon ahau

VII Vuc ahau

V Hoo ahau

III Ox ahau

I Hun ahau

XII lahca ahau

X lahun ahau

Vaxac ahau. pax ci uchi cheen yha: Vchi
oxlahun iuz Katuron Cacahi: Cha Kan pu un ti
yotochob u Katuron

VI Vac ahau

III Can ahau: chuc ci ulumil tumenob Cha Kan pu un

II Cabil ahau

XIII Oxlahun ahau

XI Buluc ahau

The record of each score of stones since the occasion when the Mouth of the Well of the Itza was found. This is written for the town, compiled so that it can be known by anyone who wishes to learn the count of these scores of stones. _____

- VI Six Lord. The Mouth of the Well of the Itza was found.
- IIII Four Lord then.
- II Two Lord.
- XIII Thirteen Lord. The mat was put in order.
- XI Eleven Lord.
- IX Nine Lord.
- VII Seven Lord.
- V Five Lord.
- III Three Lord.
- I One Lord.
- XII Twelve Lord.
- X Ten Lord.
- Eight Lord. The Mouth of the Well of the Itza was abandoned. It happened when thirteen score stones had been folded in that town. They built their homes in Savannah of the Beans during this score.

-
- VI Six Lord.
 - IIII Four Lord. Land was occupied by them at Savannah of the Beans.
 - II Two Lord.
 - XIII Thirteen Lord.
 - XI Eleven Lord.

IX Bolon ahau
 VII Vuc ahau
 V Hao ahau
 III Ox ahau
 I Hun ahau
 XII lahca ahau
 X lahun ahau
 VIII Vaxac ahau. paxci. chahan putunob. tumenob ah yha
 uinicob. Cata liob u hae le uyotochob. tuCatan: Ox
 lahun uuz u katuril: Cahanoob chahan putunob ti
 yotochob. Lay li u katuril bin ciob ah yhaob yalan
 che: yalan kaban: yalan ah ti nem yaob lae

VI Vac ahau
 III Can ahau
 II Cabil ahau.
 XIII Oxlahun ahau
 XI Buluc ahau.
 IX Bolon ahau.
 VII Vuc ahau.
 V Hoo ahau.
 III Ox ahau.
 I Hun ahau.
 XII lahca ahau.
 X lahun ahau.

VIII Vaxac ahau. paxci ah yha uinicob. uyotochob.
 tuCatan. tumen u kaban zhan. hun nac Ceel.
 tumen u uahal uahob: y ah yha mal. Oxlahun
 uuz u katuril. Cahanoob. Copaxiob tumen hun
 nac Ceel. tumen u abal unarob. ah yhaob lae

VI Vac ahau.
 III Can ahau. chuc ci. utuunil ichpaa: man
 pan. tumen ah yha uinicob. li kuloob uyotochob
 tumen ah yha maleb tumen u kaban zhan
 buy na. Ceel: lae.

IX	Nine Lord.
VII	Seven Lord.
V	Five Lord.
III	Three Lord.
I	One Lord.
XII	Twelve Lord.
X	Ten Lord.
VIII	Eight Lord. Savannah of the Beans was abandoned by the Itza people. Then they came in search of homes again. Thirteen score stones were folded while they lived in Savannah of the Beans, in their homes. As usual, this was the score of stones when the Itzas went beneath the trees, beneath the bushes, beneath the vines, in misery.
VI	Six Lord.
IIII	Four Lord.
II	Two Lord.
XIII	Thirteen Lord.
XI	Eleven Lord.
IX	Nine Lord.
VII	Seven Lord.
V	Five Lord.
III	Three Lord.
I	One Lord.
XII	Twelve Lord.
X	Ten Lord.
VIII	Eight Lord. The Itza people abandoned their homes again because of the deceitful words of Forever Cold, because he made tortillas with the people of Izamal. Thirteen score stones were folded while they lived there, then they left because of Forever Cold, because he interfered in the affairs of the Itzas.
VI	Six Lord.
IIII	Four Lord. Land was occupied at the fortress of Mayapán by the Itza people, the ones whose homes had been ruined because of the people of Izamal, because of the deceitful words of Forever Cold.

- II Cabil ahau.
- XIII Oxlahun ahau
- XI Buluc ahau.
- IX Bolon ahau.
- VII Vuc ahau.
- V Hoo ahau
- III Ox ahau
- I Hun ahau
- XII lahca ahau.
- X. lahun ahau
- VIII Vaxac ahau. uch ci püch tun. ych paa: maya pan. tumen upach paa. upach tu lum: tu men mul tepal ych cah mayapan 2al lae
- VI. Vac ahau
- III Can ahau. uch ci maya cimlal. uch ci. Oc na tu chil ych paa: Cabil ahau: uch cika kil noh ka kile: —
- XIII Oxlahun ahau: Cimci ahpula: uacpel hab. u binel u xocol haab tilakin: cuchie Caanil Han Cumlahcipop tilakin. he tunte na cici pahool kiatun haab. hun hix cip Catac oxpeli Bolon ymix hi. u kinil. lay Cimci ahpula lae: na pot xiu. tu habil. Do 158 años
- XI Buluc ahau: hul ciob Hul uinicob. tila kin. Wyah tal cahulob uyaxchun. uay tal luumil Coon maya uinice = kuhab. Do 15 13 años.

- II Two Lord.
- XIII Thirteen Lord.
- XI Eleven Lord.
- IX Nine Lord.
- VII Seven Lord.
- V Five Lord.
- III Three Lord.
- I One Lord.
- XII Twelve Lord.
- X Ten Lord.

- VIII Eight Lord. This was when stones were toppled at the fortress of Mayapán, because of the capture of the fortress. They tore down the walls because of joint rule in the town of Mayapán.

- VI Six Lord.

- IIII Four Lord. This was when death came easily, when vultures entered the fortress. Two Lord. This was the time of the fire, the great fire. _____

- XIII Thirteen Lord. The rain priest died in the sixth year. The count of the years passed to the east. Four Net came when Mat had been completed in the east. Because suspicion was everywhere, it was a violent year. Then came 1 Hunter, and when three score days had been completed, Nine Ceiba was the day when he died, the rain priest Napot Xiu. It was in the year the anno Domini 15[25]. _____

- XI Eleven Lord. The godly people arrived from the east. They brought about a situation that was ruinous. It first began to happen here in this land of ours, we who are the Maya people, in the year the anno Domini 1513. _____

IX Bolon akau. kopci Xpnoil: uch ci caput ci
hila: lay tal ychik ukaturij. hui ci obispo
to: a va xa ne hauci huy tabe tuhabid.
Do 1546 amar

VII Vuc akau. Cim ci obispo delan da.

V. Hoa akau

III OX akau

- IX Nine Lord. Christianity began. Rebirth took place. It was
this score of stones that brought the arrival of Bishop Toral
as well, who put an end to hanging by the wrists in the year
anno Domini 15[64]. _____
- VII Seven Lord. Bishop de Landa died.
- V Five Lord.
- III Three Lord.

Even when events were no longer reckoned in terms of Mayan measures of time, the desire to discover rhythms in historical occurrences continued. At the end of the last of the five Chumayel chronicles that go by scores of stones, Juan Josef Hoil added this entry on the day of a hurricane: “Today, on the 18th of August in the year 1766, what occurred was a great windstorm. I have written a record of it so that it can be numbered, so it can be seen how many years will pass until this happens again.”



22 Understanding the Language of Suyua

ON THE LAST DAY of a score of stones in Yucatán, local officials called “leaders of the towns” (*b’atab’il kajob’*) were submitted to an examination that determined whether they were worthy to continue in office during the following score. It was administered by a higher official called a “man in command” (*balach winik*). Officials with these two titles continued to play a role during the colonial period in Yucatán, and questions and answers from the examination are recorded on pages 28–32 of the Chilam Balam manuscript from Chumayel. This version of the examination was prepared for use at the end of a score of stones that ran from 1618 to 1638, ending on Three Lord (Ox Ajaw).

In his preface to the examination, the author makes the radical suggestion that “Mr. Gov. General” (Señor Gov. Mariscal), the head of the Spanish colonial administration, ought to be among those who are examined. He does not identify the governor by name but notes that his trees and his residence (meaning his hacienda) are at a place called Stack of Tortillas (Tzuk Waxim), east of the Birthplace of the Sky’s Face (Ich Ka’an Sijo’), or Mérida. By saying that the governor’s “day in office” and “way of life” will come to an end, the author likens him to town officials who fail the examination.

The author presents seven questions and answers. He titles his work *Suyua t’an yetel na’t*, in which *t’an* means “language” or “speech” and refers to the questions, and *na’t* means “understanding” or “comprehension” and refers to the answers. The language in which the questions are posed is distinguished from ordinary usage by the adjective *suyua*, whose meanings include “mixed” and “confused.” In this context, it means that the language of the questions is metaphorical rather than literal. The questions are riddles, and the answers require an understanding of metaphor.

When the word *suyua* occurs as part of the name of a town, it indicates that more than one language is spoken there. Among the several towns called Holtun in the Chumayel book, one is distinguished from the others by the double name Holtun Suyua. The exact location of this town is unknown, but it is described as the western member of a four-directional group of towns that bounded a world in which Chichén Itzá occupied the central position. It could have been as far west as Tabasco, where there were towns whose residents spoke a Mayan language alongside Nahuatl. In the Popol Vuh, a city where many languages are spoken is called Tulan Suyua. The name Tulan signifies a place where pilgrims could have their royal status validated, which is why the founders of the K’iche’ kingdom went there. The name Suyua, in addition to fitting the multilingual character of the city, suggests that pilgrims might have been required to solve riddles.

14

Suyuaa than, y Naat. Vhal Cayum S. Gov
 Max, Cal, lay uchi ucahtal, que ua xim lae
 Zula kin, ych Caan Cihoo, tiyan luum vchi
 vyantatv pakali y v Solax, uchi ucahtal
 lae. Binix kachue tu kin uho lol v bel
 xan, talet uthan, vhalach Vinic Cit, Chac
 Vthan Cabin uluc, Chac Cix ubuc xan.



I le le ac, tu Suyua than, lay binu
 than, lay binu khat, vhalach u
 nicit; Cah lae, Cabin kachue tu kin
 v So col uthan, ah Ox Ahau Katur
 Cabin Culac uyarat Katur; ah hun a
 hau Katur. Bay a lanil lae



hex Katur he le lae, Ox ahau Katur
 Docix ukuchut tu kinil, u so col
 ya hau lil, y vtepat: halitibe: ma
 nanix vyarat



hex hun ahau Katur, Culanychi
 yot Dch ah Ox ahau Katur lae
 yula te, tan u sabal uchan, tumenit
 ah Ox ahau Katur lae. Sub zil, bin
 bin balob, tu cakalob

Suyua language & meaning. They pertain to our father, Mr. Gov. General, whose trees, whose residence is at Stack of Tortillas, east of the Birthplace of the Sky's Face. This is the land where his trees are, his recompense & his estate, the trees, the habitat that are his. And his day in office will come to an end, his way of life as well. Drawing near is the word of the man in command. Great are his words when he arrives, and grand are his garments as well. ____



On this day, in Suyua language, these are the words, these are the questions asked by the man in command of the town. When the days in office have been depleted for the master of Three Lord's score of stones, then the master of another score of stones is seated, One Lord's score of stones. Thus comes the next generation. ____



The score of stones today is Three Lord's score, but his day in office is finished, his lordship is finished, & his sovereignty. It has come to an end for him, and it goes to a different lease holder. ____



The master of One Lord's score of stones is seated inside the home of the master of Three Lord's score of stones. He is a guest there, while authority is transferred to him by the master of Three Lord's score of stones. Insults are traded, so they say, in the place where they reside.

 Kat nāt, Cutābel, ychid ukaturit, li
Cil aso col hule lae. li Kuchita kinib
u karabal, vnaa tob u Batabil, Cahob,
Vayohelob, vchi u tale lob, vvinici lob
yahau lob, Va golān u tale v Batabilob
Vhalach vvinici lob, Vau chi balob a hau
uob, Va Batab vchi balob, Ku hak curti
cob

 Heix uyax chun than, bin karabac
tiobe. bin ukatob, vhanal - ta
lex kin; Ci bin utkan. halach vinic
tiob, bay bin alabacti Batabobe - ta
lex kin Mehehe: Caa la thab. tin pla
to, li chi caan lan za caanil Cauz: tan
C haumue apue si kal, tiy x Culan
yax Balam yohol kin u kie, u ki
kele - Suyua, unaa taal; hex kin bin
karabac tiob lae: Yahau hah bit
hee - hex lan za: y caanil Cauz. chi
caan tpuue si kale: lay lie yalice.
lay ci itkane: hex yaxx balam Cam
cabal yohol u kie u ki kele lay ya
ax yc: balam yanie: Suyua than lai.

 Hex u cachic than bin karabac
tiobe, Caxi cob u cha ob, vromel
Caanyilab halach vinic Vaba
nun u cah, yan uol vilab; vchi
u ilab Cii uil yala balobe; hex v
romel caane: lay pome - Suyua -



This is the test of meaning that comes during the score of stones that is finished today. Now the day has arrived for questioning the knowledge of the leaders of the towns. Are they familiar with the trees where their personas originated, their lordly status? Do they come from the rank of leaders, of men in command? Are they in the lineage of lords? Are there leaders in their lineage? Now they must prove themselves. __



Now for the first words that begin the questions put to them. It is food they are asked for: "Bring the sun." Filled with delight are the words the man in command has for them, as they are spoken to the leaders: "Bring the sun, my son. Carry it in the palm of your hand, to my plate, with a lance run through it, a tall cross in the middle of its heart, with a crouching green jaguar piercing the sun, drinking its blood." In the meaning of Suyua, this is the sun that is asked of them: a fried egg of royal size. And this is the lance & the tall cross run through its heart: the implement in question is speech, it is the words of a blessing. And this is the seated green jaguar piercing the sun, drinking its blood: it is a green chili pepper. Such is the jaguar, in the language of Suyua.



Now for the piercing words of the second question put to them, when they go in search of the brains of the sky, so that the man in command can see how massive they are. "This is what I want to see. It's been some time since I've seen them," so they are told. And these are the brains of the sky: they consist of copal incense. Suyua.

Quxuyoxchie than binhabai robe.
Cau Haxob Nohoch na; Vae thil Vuan.
Hun dit ti li yoe mal: heix Nohoch Na
Lae: Lay Tahau poc sos lae; bin ala bac h
Canacac yohol Tahau Sa sac himin - Sa
Sac Vnoh y Sa yem - y Sa sac Coot: ymaeh
ma tu hab: Tamuk u soot tie: V himin:
Tiyar O lom kik. tu lol V soot: tiuil ulu
Hula: Hleyx Sa sac himin lae: Lay yoe
bil xanab: Sos cil Kaane: heix Sa sac
Coot. tie yala bale: Lay Sa sac Sa yema:
Lay Nic tee: Sa sac gulu be: - heix
O lom kik V lol soot tie: tie uha cabai
tie. Lay takine: yan tan chamexce
yohol kikil li kul: tukikhe: yx
manaa: yx mayum: V tal lae: -

Qheix u canchie than binhabai robe.
Caxicob tiyotoch, Cabralabac robe, heix
Cablin talacex, avil benex: tu hab
Chumuc kin vale: Caput palex: hat
a Cahex: Cablin ulucex. Tiyar aual pe.
Tachex: heix aual pe. tie x tie: V
nachma V Pi xan Caci tieh colul cabin
ulu ceh yetel: heix Caput. padit tie
yalabal tie: hat Chumuc kin. Cablin x tie: V
Cumtanma u booy: Lay tie cil yalabal. kin kin
V bi net: Cablin kin chuc: yie nal halach: va
nice: heix yal peh tie u habal tie: Lay V
Chupit: heix V Pi xan Caci tieh. Colul
yahau Candelay: ha cha. cibo: - Sugua
than lae



Now for the piercing words of the third question put to them, when they lash together a large house, six posts long as measured from one post to the next.

And this is the large house: it is a royal hat placed on the ground. One of them may be told to mount a royal and shining white horse. He wears a shining white mantle & cape, & shining white is the rattle he holds in his hand while he shakes it at his horse. There is coagulated blood in the flower of his rattle, which oozes out of it. And this is the shining white horse: it is an open-sided sandal made of henequen fibers. And as for the shining white rattle that is mentioned, along with the shining white cape: these are frangipani flowers, joined together in a shining white wreath. And this is the coagulated blood in the flower of the rattle that is asked of him: it is the gold, there in the center. Finally, there is the source of the bleeding. It is her blood, she who has no mother, she who has no father. It comes from her. _____



Now for the piercing words of the fourth question put to them, when they go to the man's home. They are told, "So now you will come, you will appear when it

is hot, shortly after the middle of the day. You will be small children again, you will come crawling clumsily. When you arrive, your female dog will be there behind you. And this female dog of yours will carry the soul of Our Blessed Lady in her teeth when you arrive with her." And this is the return to childhood that is asked of him, in the heat of the middle of the day: he will go along casting his shadow, this is what is meant by crawling clumsily as he goes. Then there is the burden he brings to the man in command. This is the female dog that is asked of him: it is his woman. And this is the soul of Our Blessed Lady: it is candles of royal size, made of genuine wax. This is

Suyua language.



heix vho chie than, bin Katabac tiobe
 bin alabac tiob, caxi cob, vchaob vpuac
 sihal hu: cit bil: ti caan: heix cabin
 atalus tene Ox lahunyal: vtar: tij te
 pan upachty cac poh. heix lay vpuac sihal hu
 Cit bil: lie yala bal tiob lae: Lay Kane: heix
 vtar: lay ox lahunyal: lie ya la bale: Lay
 yahau: Vake: Ox lahunyal. buul yan y chi
 te: heix sasac poze: Lay sasac no ke: Lay
 bin Katabac tiob = Vndatul: Suyua



heix vuac chie than bin Katabac ti
 obe: V binet vchaob. Vhabchoo =
 y ox bal hax: y Cuxul' ah: lay bin
 vclit te. yn hanal samal: yan uol
 yn nante: may uil lob uku xul v
 chunchoe = Cij ya la balob = heix v
 chunchoe: lay chope: heix ox bal ha
 xe: lay une huke: heix Cuxul' ahe
 lay v chochal hekene: heix vchun
 choe: vchun une chop: Suyua than



heix vuac chie than bin Katabac
 tiobe: bin alabac tiob, xen mol
 ten umac yit donot: Capel sasa
 ci: Capel han kani = yan uol yn
 hante: heix umac yit donot: lie u
 Katabal tiobe: Lay sasac chi came: Ca
 pel han kani = Vndatul: Vchue =
 Vchucul vBatabil cah: Capul tutan
 ahan = Yax halach vinic lae



Now for the piercing words of the fifth question put to them. They are told to go get the heart of the Divine Benefactor in the Sky. “And now you shall bring me thirteen layers of bedding, wrapped around with white cords.” And this is the heart of the Divine Benefactor they are told about: it is a bead of precious stone. And this is the bedding in thirteen layers that is mentioned: it is a royal tortilla with thirteen layers of beans inside. And as for the shining white cords, what is asked of them is a shining white mantle, in the meaning of Suyua. _____



Now for the piercing words of the sixth question put to them. They go off to get a branch from a pochote tree, & a thread of three strands, & a living vine. These are what he savors: “They are my food for tomorrow, what I want to eat. It shouldn’t be so bad to gnaw on the trunk of a pochote tree,” so they are told. And this is the trunk of the pochote tree: it is a red and black lizard. And this is the cord of three strands: it is the tail of an iguana. And this is the living vine: it is the intestines of a peccary. And this is the trunk of the pochote tree: it is the base of the tail of a red and black lizard. Suyua language. ____



Now for the piercing words of the seventh question put to them. They are told, “Go gather seashells at the bottom of the cenote, two of them shining white, two of them brownish gray. I want to eat them.” And these are the seashells at the bottom of the cenote that are asked of them: they are two shining white jícama roots, and two that are brownish gray. These are the meanings they must grasp in order to take over the leadership of towns, when they are brought before the lord who is the first-ranking man in command. _____

He thanob lae. Vamazan v va tabal tunen
v Batabil Cahob: Okom mol hil: che
Tap lay hom ahab, cha hax than hil yotach
Okom mol hil hom Okom bul Cumitan che
muc tancab, yic nal ah al mehenilob
ah Cimit; mau naa ticob; ah Cux tal bin
unaa tab; lay bin yanac yokol v Bata
bil Cahob, lay yet pi san v hach bilan
ohel tabal yail bin doc ce bal ahau
lil lae — Lay haxan v hach tutan
y yuma: che: Chapayan v Sumit, bin
tabal v cah, yic nal ahau, yax ha
lach, uinre; lay v doc Batabil, lay
bin yanac, yokol v Cokin, v Co ha
tun; bin yu bob ya Cabin docoe, v ba
lob, v Batabil Cahob; lay bin yanac
tu kin lae; hij de bal u than hachun
Cabin docoe ah Ox. ahau hachun
Chu Com u Batabil Cahob, tu men
minanul, v Naa tab lae erri

Look upon these words. If they are not understood by the leaders of the towns, then a star of anguish and affliction will adorn the night. There will be dismay in their homes, anguish and affliction; the torment of large hairy flies will enter the patios of the nobility. Those who fail to understand will be dead; those who do understand will live on. This applies to the leaders of towns in general. The procedures have been transcribed here in order to make it known that the end of sovereignty is a grave matter. — Their hands are tied in front of them, & they wear a wooden yoke. They are dragged along at the end of a thick rope when they are taken to the place where the lord is, the first-ranking man in command. It is the end for leaders. This applies to the fools, the madmen of the day, of the score of stones. They will feel pain when the end comes for the business that concerns the leaders of towns. This will happen on the day that concludes the word of the score of stones, when the end comes for the master of Three Lord's score of stones. The leaders of the towns will be apprehended because they lack understanding of these things. ~~~~~





23 Song of the Birth of the Twenty Days

SOME OF THE WRITINGS collected in the Chilam Balam books are responses to Christian teachings. The authors of these works, unlike the missionaries whose preaching they had heard, did not set up an opposition between Mayan and Christian ideologies, arguing that one was true and the other false. Instead, they found ways to weave selected Christian ideas into what remained an unmistakably Mayan discourse. They used the alphabet but wrote in their own language, with the addition of a few new words they found useful. They used a prose format but followed an entirely Mayan poetics in their phrasing. The work presented in this chapter, from pages 60–63 of the Chumayel manuscript, has the appearance of prose, but it is constructed entirely of parallel phrases in groups of two, three, and four. The opening sentence describes it as a song (*k'ay*), but we do not know how it might have been sung.

The author of this work was obviously intrigued by the way in which Genesis combines the origins of the world and the week in the same narrative, but he substitutes the twenty Mayan day names for the seven days of the week. He was undoubtedly an *ajk'in*, or “daykeeper,” a diviner who made use of the Mayan calendar that combines twenty names with thirteen numbers. In fact, he may have arrived at his story by posing the question of how the present world came into existence and then divining the answer. If so, he is not so much the author of the story he wrote down as the medium through which it was transmitted. He attributes it to a person he describes as the “first sage,” named Melchisedek (rendered as “Merchise” in the manuscript), and the “first prophet” and “first daykeeper,” named Napuctun.

Melchisedek is a biblical name, belonging to a righteous king who welcomed Abraham to his court. In Christian theology, the most important thing about Melchisedek is that the Bible does not name his parents or any other ancestors. Because of this theologians have interpreted his presence on earth as prefiguring that of Christ, who did not descend from a human father. Napuctun, for his part, is one of five Mayan priests who are described elsewhere in the Chumayel manuscript as having prophesied the coming of Christianity. Tun is his given name, and the rest of his name identifies his mother (*na'*) as a member of the Puk lineage. His own lineage is unknown, which may be why the author identified him with Melchisedek.

The main character in the story transmitted to the daykeeper by Melchisedek or Napuctun is given the Spanish name Dios, always abbreviated as Ds. and always embedded in a reverential phrase whose longest version is *Ka yumil ti Dios kitb'il*, “Our Lord God the Father.” The God of this story was the first man to walk on the earth,

but his maternal grandmother, maternal aunt, paternal grandmother, and sister-in-law were already there. They discovered his footprints and measured the interval between them. His first footprint appeared on 12 Foot (12 Ok) and then, after forty days, his second footprint appeared on 13 Foot. Starting on that day, the four women walked along with him for twenty days, and he gave a name to each day as it came.

The accounts of events on particular days often involve plays on the sounds of the day names. In the simplest kind of play, the proper name is treated as if it were a common noun, as when Ok becomes *ok*, meaning “foot.” In the same way, Eb’ is treated as the term for “stairway,” Kib’ as the term for “wax,” and Ik’ as the term for “breath.” Other names are transformed into slightly different words: Kab’an becomes *kab’*, meaning “honey”; Kimi becomes *kimil*, meaning “death”; and Lamat becomes *lam*, referring to the act of submerging something.

In still other cases, the writer incorporates the sound of a monosyllabic day name or a single syllable from a longer name into a word or phrase that is otherwise quite different. The day name Ix, which could have been interpreted as meaning “jaguar,” becomes a syllable in the phrase *unix pajal*, referring to the act of opening a gap between two objects by tilting one of them. The *me* in the day name Men becomes a syllable in *meyaj*, referring to an object that has been worked. Etz’nab’ lends its first syllable to *etz’lajki*, meaning that something is put in place. Ak’b’al (miswritten as “Akal” the first time it appears in the manuscript) could have been interpreted as a word for “night,” but it lends its first syllable to *yak’saj*, referring to the act of wetting something. An etymological interpretation of the day name Chikchan would produce *chan*, the Ch’olan word for “snake,” but a sound play on *chik* produces *uchiktajal*, referring to the act of discovering something. And Muluk, which could have been interpreted as alluding to “tribute,” lends its first syllable to *ummuuk*, referring to the act of covering or hiding something.

At some point in the history of this text, a copyist who had noticed the sound plays changed one of the day names to fit its interpretation, apparently thinking that he was correcting an error. When he saw that the day Ox B’en (Three Lack) was followed by *u ment*, referring to the act of crafting something, he wasn’t satisfied with the play on *en* and thought the day name should be Men, even though the day that properly bears this name comes two days later. Thus, he ended up with two days named Men, and he repeated this error in the list of twenty days (with different numbers) that follows the narrative. Both errors have been corrected in the present translation.

In Yucatán, the divinatory calendar disappeared during the colonial period, but numerous communities in highland Guatemala continue to use it. Daykeepers (*ajq’ij*) who speak K’iche’, like the daykeeper who transmitted the text under discussion here, make extensive use of sound plays when they interpret the meanings of day names. In some cases, they interpret the proper names for days by treating them as common nouns—for example, by interpreting K’an as *k’an*, meaning “net,” referring to a carrying net and (by extension) to burdens of all kinds. In other cases, they may play on the sound of the day name to produce a different word, as when they transform Aq’ab’al,

Bayholci yaxahmia^h. mexchise: yaxah
bouat: Napue tun. Sacerdote. yaxahkin
layhay uchciuc; hil vinal. tima to Rhac
Cab Cuchie: timato Cahopi uxim bal tuba
tuhurat. Cayalah uchich: Cayalah udenaa:
Cayalah umim: Cayalah umuu: Bal bin
c alab. Cabin c ylab Vinic ti be: Cutharob
tamuk uxim balob: Cuchie: minan uinic
Cuchi: Caan huchiob teti li kine: Ca
hopi yalico: mac li mani Vaylae: heyocob
lae: pis-tauoci. Ci bin urhan u Coli' cab.
Cabin upirah yoe Cayumitri D' cix bil: Layu
chun yalci. Xoc lah cab: Oc lae. lah caoc
Layholan cihci. tamen Oxlahun oc: Vchici
unup tarba yoe: li kciob teti li kine: Ca
yalah uha ba= timinan uha ba kin Cuchie
Ximbal nah ci: y Vchiich: yu denaa: y V
mimi: y Vmuu: Ci uinal: cihci kin
Vha ba cihci: Caan y luum: Eb ha: luum.
tunich: y che: Cihci v bal hah nab: y luum.
hun chuen. Vholci ci uba tu kuit: Vment
ci Caan y luum: Ca Eb: Vment ci yaxeb=
Em ci li kuit tar yot Caan: tar yot ha:
minan luum y tunich: y che: Ox men: V
ment ci tulacal bal: hi bakur. bal: va
Caanob y u bal hah nab y v bal luum
Can.

According to what was recorded by the first sage, Melchisedek, the first prophet, Napuctun, the priest, the first daykeeper, this is the song of the birth of the twenty days long ago. When the earth had not yet awakened he began to walk alone, on his own. Then his mother's mother said, then his mother's sister said, then his father's mother said, then his sister-in-law said, "What are we going to say when we see a man on the road?" So they said while they walked long ago. There were no men long ago. When at last they arrived in the east, they started talking. "Who walked this way? This is someone's footprint. Measure it with your foot." Filled with delight were the words of the Lady of the Earth. Then they measured the footprint of Our Lord God the Father. This is the origin of the saying, "Count the width of the world," which signifies the day Twelve Foot. This was the count when the days were born, and for this reason it was Thirteen Foot when the print of his other foot appeared. The days arose over there in the east as he spoke their names, long ago when there were no names for days. He walked along with his mother's mother, with his mother's sister, with his father's mother, with his sister-in-law. The twenty days were born, the names of the days were born, the sky was born with the land, the stairway of water, land, stone, and wood. The things in the sea and on land were born. One Artisan was the day when he revealed himself to be divine, he made the sea and land by hand. Two Stairway was the day when he made the first stairway, which descended from the heart of the sky to the heart of the water when there was no earth, or stone, or wood. Three Lack was the day when he crafted all things, as many things as there are, the things in the sky, and the things in the sea, and the things on the land.

Four

Canix: uchci unix pahal Caan y luum: ho
mer: uchci umeyah tula cal. Vac cib. uch
ci ument ci. yax cib: Vchci u ca silkal:
liminan kin: y:V: Vac Caban. yax cihci
cab: liminan toon. Cuchi: Vaxac Qnab:
Qlah ci. u klab. y yoc: Cau chichaa. yo
kol luum: Bolon Cauac: yax tum tabci:
mer nal: lahun Akhau: Vchci vbinob: v
lobil Vini cob nimer nal tumen D. cit bil:
machicanac Cuchie: Bulu yx uch
ci upatic tunich yche: layu murcath
ychil kin: lah ca bil yk: Vchci uch
ci yk: = layuchan u klabatic yk. tumenmi
nan Cimil ychil lae: Oxlahun Akhal vch
ci uchac haa: Cayak sak luum: Caupatah
Cauinichi: kunnit kan: Vyax mer ci utepel
yol tumenut vlobiluchicah: Cachicchan:
uchci uchic tahal vlobil hi bal yitah ychil uwich
lahe: Ox cimil vlucci mit uchci. utus
ci yax Cimil: Cayumil ti D.

Holamas: layutus ci vuclam Chac haal Akh
nab: Vac muluc: Vchci Vmuc Chahal kopob
tula cal: tima to Akhac Cabe: layuchci yoc
vluethanet Cayumil ti D. tula cal: = ti
minan tunthan ti Caan: liminan tunich
y che: Cuchi: Cahun binob utum tu
baob Cayalah tun bayla =

Oxlahun

Four Jaguar was the day when the sky and earth were left ajar. Five Work was the day when the work of separation took place. Six Wax was the day when the first wax candle was made. Light was shining where there was no sun or moon. Seven Earth was the day that brought the birth of the first honey, which was not there for us long ago. Eight Blade was the day when he steadied his hands and feet, then he picked up seeds and sowed the land. Nine Pride was the day when the underworld came under consideration for the first time. Ten Lord was the day when it happened that people who were evil went to the underworld, since God the Father was not celebrated long ago. Eleven Ceiba was the day when he gave form to stone and wood, he made them on this day. Twelve Wind was the day when he brought about the birth of breath. The reason for calling it “breath” is that there was no death on this day. Thirteen Night was the day when he was hauling water, then he wetted the earth, then he gave the right form to it, then it became a person. One Net was the day when he made the first anger, because he had brought about the birth of evil. Two Snake was the day when he discovered evil, which he saw in the eyes of ordinary people. Three Death was the day when he devised death. It happened that the first death was an invention of Our Lord God.

Five Sunk was the day when he devised the seven submersions, the great waters of the seas. Six Tribute was the day when the caverns were covered over, all of them, when the earth had not yet awakened. Then came the introduction of the words composed by Our Lord God, all of them. There was no word in the sky, there was no wood or stone long ago. **T**hen they went to test one another, and he spoke this way:

Thirteen

OXlahun tuc::: Vucluc hun = Lay Talah cahok
 Vikan himinan than::: Cakatab uchun hunen yax
 Ahau him: Maix hepahac Vmucul than iob: Vchebat
 Vthanicu ba obe::: Ca binob tanyol caan Caumachash
 Vthab hu baran baobe: Ca hun ua lah tan Chumuc peten:
 heklay² lae:: hek'laobi ah too cob Can tu lob lae

Can chic chan	O	Ah	toc	E 2°
Ca nil	OC	Ah	toc	Pio
Camen	O	Ah	toc	MER
Can ahau	O	Ah	toc	
Lay akauob Can tu lob lae				

Vaxac muluc Noil Ca uoc
 Bolon oc Vac a hau
 Lahun Chuen 2 Vay Imix
 Buluc eb Vacixacil yk.
 Lah camen 4 Bolon a ka bal
 OXlahun yx 5 Lahun Kan
 hun men 6 Bu luc chic chan
 Cacib Lah ca Cimiy
 OX caban 7 OXlahun man ik
 Can Cnab hun lamat.

Lay cikci Vinal y uch ciyahat cab: golci
 Caan yluum. y cheob ydenich. Cih ciu
 Calrimen Cayumil ti D' lae Lay ciu bil

Thirteen lots and seven lots make one," he said as he pulled out the words when there were no words. Then the first Lord of the Days asked whether there was any reason why the organs needed for speech shouldn't be opened, so that they could speak to one another. Then they walked to the heart of the sky, then they held hands facing one another, then they stood in the middle of the peninsula. The branches were separated. The days for burning offerings were set apart, four of them:

Four Snake_____	☉____ For burning	
Four _____	F☉OT For burning	
Four Work_____	☉____ For burning	
Four Lord_____	☉____ For burning	
_____These are the lords, four of them._____		

Eight Tribute_____	Five Pride _____
Nine Foot_____	Six Lord _____
Ten Artisan_____	2—Seven Ceiba _____
Eleven Stairway_____	Eight Wind_____
Twelve Lack_____	4—Nine Night _____
Thirteen Jaguar _____	5—Ten Net _____
One Work _____	6—Eleven Snake_____
Two Wax _____	Twelve Death _____
Three Earth _____	7—Thirteen Deer _____
Four Blade_____	One Sunk _____

Thus were born the twenty days, and it came about that the earth was awakened. The sky and land and trees and rocks were arranged. All things were born because of our Lord God the Father.

Timiran Caan y luum: ti boy Janit tu Diosil
tumuyalit. tu ba tu kumal Cau çih cah bal cah
tuçinut: Cape nahi tucaanüt tukuit ti boy noli
u Chucil yanit ahlepale

Vholan kin Çançamal licil vxocol.
VChun tilikine he bix holanile

When sky and land did not exist, he was already there, a divine presence in the clouds, by himself alone, when he brought about the birth of the entire world, when his spirit moved in the sky. His power was already great, he was sovereign.

The days were ordered one after the other at the time the count began in the east, just as they are still ordered.



24 Conversations with Madness

THE ANCIENT GODS of Yucatán continued to hear their names during the colonial period. Among those who invoked them were healers who treated a wide variety of illnesses, using combinations of herbs and words. At some point during the early seventeenth century, some of these practitioners used alphabetic writing to create collections of curative incantations. Today their works are known only from a single compendium that dates from the late eighteenth century, which draws on two or more earlier sources and is written in two different hands.

Prominent among the deities named in the incantations are the Four Gods, Four Actors (Kantul ti' K'u, Kantul ti' B'akab'), and for that reason, the compendium has been given the title "Ritual of the Bacabs." The manuscript itself carries no general title, but each incantation carries a preface that names the illness or illnesses in question and describes the corresponding incantation as an "oration" (*t'anil*) or "dialogue" (*ya'lab'al*), or else refers to its intended effect on the illness by calling it a "trap" (*petz'il*) or "destroyer" (*pa'il*).

Oral tradition may have been the only immediate source for the incantations, but it is possible that sources written in the Mayan script, which continued in use as late as the end of the seventeenth century, were in the line of transmission at some point. Whatever the sources, the writers added instructions for the proper use of the incantations and even suggested, in the case of the second of the examples presented here, the tone of voice the speaker should use.

The writers clearly sought to create scripts that could be studied and perhaps memorized in advance of a performance, or else read aloud. By comparison, the ritual texts in the surviving codices are more in the nature of prompts or outlines for a performer, and the only instructions concern the selection of appropriate dates for rituals.

First among the illnesses addressed by the incantations are various forms of madness whose symptoms include a lack of judgment, spasms, frenzy, fury, and shameless lust. The common term for all of these illnesses is *tankas* (or *tamakas*), which is also a term for the Milky Way. The connection may lie in the contrast between the character of the Milky Way and that of the ecliptic, the narrow path followed by the sun, moon, and planets. The Milky Way lies at right angles to the ecliptic, and it is wide and has blurry edges. Running through much of its length is a dark rift, the Black Road that leads to the underworld in the Popol Vuh, whereas the ecliptic is the path followed by the sky's brightest lights.

The incantations treat illnesses as manifestations of sentient beings. The process of overcoming them involves exposing their identities, addressing them by name, and tracing them back to their birth at the beginning of the present world. These steps lay the groundwork for exorcising the illnesses, which means not only removing them from the patient but also throwing them all the way out to the edges of the living world or down into the realm of death.

Both of the incantations translated here mention the divinatory dates One Lord (Jun Ajaw) and Four Lord (Kan Ajaw). One Lord is the Yukatek name for the hero called Junajpu in the Popol Vuh, who survived his own death and (with his twin brother) overcame the lords of death itself. Four Lord, according to Classic inscriptions and the Dresden Codex, is the date that marked the transition between the previous world and the present one.

The first incantation is from pages 4–11 of the manuscript, and the second is from pages 25–30.

INCANTATION FOR JAGUAR MACAW MADNESS

The term *ch'ab'*, translated here as “chaos,” refers to disturbances in the natural order such as earthquakes and tidal waves. In the present context, it describes the state of flux that existed during the darkness that separated the destruction of the previous world from the ordering of the present one. The final end of the old world fell on a date whose name, Kan Ajaw, or “Four Lord,” can also be taken to mean “Sky Lord.” In the present world, chaos may erupt not only in the form of natural disasters but also in the madness of human beings. In Jaguar Macaw Madness, it takes the form of stupid, drunken, or lascivious behavior.

The reference to the plucking out of the sun’s eye is probably an allusion to a story similar to the one about Seven Macaw in the Popol Vuh. During the previous world, he pretended to be the sun, but his shining eye was removed when that world ended. The noisy birds at the entrance to the underworld also appear in the Popol Vuh, but not the goddess invoked here as “Foreigner” and “Doorkeeper of the Earth.” The general Mayan term for the underworld, Xib’alb’a, is replaced by Metnal, from Nahuatl Mictlan, translated here as “Hell.”

Behind the various references to a lancet, the tip of the penis, and a needle for drawing blood is a ritual of sacrifice in which men of noble descent drew blood by piercing their foreskins. Judging from the incantation, this ritual was conceived as reenacting the myth of the founding of a patrilineage, with the instrument of sacrifice and the foreskin playing the parental roles and the child emerging in the form of blood.

Among the animals invoked by the incantation is the *kan ch'ab'*, or “spitting snake,” an unidentified species that is said to be large, yellow, and nonpoisonous. The omen-

4
 Vñ anil balam mota
 Ca Jey Coil tan Ca Jia
 Hun Ahau hunuc Can
 ahau Can ahaubin chab
 Can ahaubin ahab Coi
 hechi mac cech tah chit
 pñac cech tah ahab uhab
 berdi hin chae ahau
 alop unich hin Calihak
 Max ana maxa Coob Cit
 En chab ta bech chait
 lix chet la Calix chet
 an ye la yx hunge toon
 la ana la a Cob a lit Can

Incantation for Jaguar Macaw Madness,
for the desire this madness brings:

"One Lord, one and only Four Lord, Sky
 Lord would have been in chaos, Sky Lord
 would have been dark when you were
 born. Who are you, owner of chaos? Who
 are you, owner of night? You are in chaos,
 Great Lord of Days, the eye of the sun was
 plucked out when you were born. Who is
 your mother, what father begets you when
 you do penance? She is Red Rainbow,
 White Rainbow, she is the point of the
 lancet, the tip of the penis, this is your
 mother, your father, begetter,

5
 Citupache Can Citupach
 che max Cat jih cech u
 Cool chabe uCool ahabe
 Can chaloche Can chah
 lo hunich Calihach uCo
 ol ahab ah Citan Cose
 Cech uCool chabe Ce
 ech ah Co tan Cose Ce
 ch nicle tan Cose Cech
 balam tan Cose Cech
 ah mo tan Cose Cech
 Citan Cose max a che
 Citupache Can Citupach

together behind there, together behind
 the sweat bath when you were born, the
 desire in that chaos, desire in that dark-
 ness, the spitting snake was in the tree,
 the spitting snake was on the rock when
 you were born, desire in the darkness.
 Master of Drunken Madness, you are the
 desire in the chaos, you are Master of
 Stupid Madness, you are Lascivious Mad-
 ness, you are Jaguar Madness, you are
 Master of Macaw Madness, you are Deer
 Madness. Who is your tree? Who is your
 bush? What served as your bed, your
 bower when you were born?

6
 cha cal tan cas che sa cal
 tan cas che ehel tan
 che hanal tan case
 cal han te mo sa cal han
 te mo ehel han te mo
 hanal han te mo a che
 la a che cechi mo tan case
 cha cal has max sa cal has
 max ehel has max hanal
 has max cha cal ho ho
 max y y y cha cal ni te
 max y y y la a che cechi mo
 te tan case max tan case
 cechi co tan case

The red tree of madness, white tree of
 madness, black tree of madness, yellow
 tree of madness, the red macaw acacia,
 white macaw acacia, black macaw aca-
 cia, yellow macaw acacia are your trees.
 These are your trees, you Macaw Mad-
 ness. The red mamey, who is the white
 mamey? Who is the black mamey? Who
 is the yellow mamey? Who is the red
 viper tree? Who is white, black, yellow?
 The red frangipani, who is white, black,
 yellow? These are your trees, Lascivious
 Madness. Who is the madness? You are
 Stupid Madness . . .

2
 bin y enal yx hun pu sub
 hiki yx hun pu sub olom
 u col ba chah u col ba
 kab tit kaxahi nam ye
 nal ix hun pu sub hiki yx
 hun pu sub olom tituchmah
 uhi nam y enal tux oah
 ha a ma ba can hai olom
 ba can ah oc tan cas at
 ci mo tan cas he ba can col
 chab can tan cas ba cin
 pi chin tex to cechi can
 ti hia cechi can hai ba
 cab ulubul bin ye nat

you will be where she is, a needle for
 drawing blood, a needle for gore, respite
 comes for the chaos, respite comes for the
 darkness, the bond is shaken loose where
 she is, a needle for drawing blood, a nee-
 dle for drawing gore, the seizure is shaken
 out, there where he vomited water, only it
 wasn't water flowing, it was gore flowing,
 Master of Traveler's Madness, Master of
 Drunken Macaw Madness flowed out.
 What about the desire of chaos, the illness
 of madness? Drain them away then, you
 Four Gods, you Four Who Pour the Years.
 They will fall where she is,

8
 ix hān hīnich ix hān chaah
 olom ye nal ix hūntah a
 Cax olom pichin tex to ye
 nal ix hūntah a Cax olom
 pichin tex to cex Cantul
 hū Cax Cantul tība Cābe u
 lubul bīn ye nal yx Cōtan
 Cax eh' Cam hīn Chitang yē
 nal yx Cōtan Cax eh' tuchiah
 Vhab u Cōlba chab u Cōlba
 ahah tule zahix hīh hī
 mac Cōt xan tuleg ahix
 Kīhī tīa Cax tūn bla pūter

Yellow Sun Face, Yellow Dripper of Gore,
 where she is, the sole owner of the ac-
 cursed gore. Drain it away then, to the
 place where she is, the sole owner of
 accused gore, drain it away then, you Four
 Gods, you Four Who Pour the Years, it will
 fall where she is, the star of Stupid Mad-
 ness, it will lie four days in the place where
 she is, the star of Stupid Madness. He bit
 his arm, relieving the chaos, relieving the
 darkness, and he also tasted the blood in
 the sweat bath, and he tasted the blood on
 the foundation stone. Well then, throw

9
 jo u Cōt chabe u Cōt hābe ?
 Cex Cantul tīhū Cex Cantul
 tība Cābe ulubul bīn tūn
 yōl met nal yē nal uye
 m. Canyah ual hāh' Cūlic
 yx mac uaye yx mac u
 hol Cāb laba Cax naa laba
 Cax u Cōt Cīt Cax hūch tōn
 yōl met nal hūmuc nac Cax
 hūc nac yauat u chī chī
 bax chabla cex Cantul tī
 hū Cex Cantul tība Cābe
 Cīhīn yā laba tūmānān
 yā ual hāh' Cantul tī
 Cantul tība Cābe hūmuc nac

the desire of chaos there, desire of
 darkness, you Four Gods, you of the
 Four Directions, it will fall into the
 heart of Hell where its father sits,
 Ultimate Enemy of Fire, where she is,
 the Foreigner, Doorkeeper of the Earth.
 This is its mother, this is its lustful father
 when it arrives in the heart of Hell.
 Raucous, thunderous are the cries of
 the birds. What about this chaos, you
 Four Gods, you of the Four Directions?"
 This will be the dialogue concerning
 the Ultimate Enemy of Fire when
 speaking to the Four Gods, the Four
 Directions. "Raucous are the

¹⁰
 ya uat uchi chi' umutit
 tumen yx mauaye ixma
 uhol Cab chac tan chi' chi'
 sac tan sipip chac tan sipip
 yx bo Caan yx ho min yal
 labin pul kint alubic tan
 yal met nat Co tan Co ba
 Cin mo tan Co ba Cin balam
 tan Co ba Cin bla u Col chab
 Clubi Co Cex Can tul ti' kiu
 Cex Can tul ti' ba Cab co
 ho balix ha xan ma ba can
 ha i' kiti ba can olom ba can

cries of the birds, the bringers of omens
 on her behalf, the Foreigner, Doorkeeper
 of the Earth, red-breasted birds, white-
 breasted falcons, red-breasted falcons,
 thrushes in the sky, thrushes in the clouds:
 these will portend your fall into the heart
 of Hell. What about stupid madness? What
 about macaw madness? What about jaguar
 madness? Well then, the desire of chaos is
 yours to level out, you Four Gods, you
 of the Four Directions. Aha! The water
 spreads thin, but what flows is not water
 but blood flowing, gore flowing from the

tuche ah mo balam tan Co "
 Cibin yalabal Caa thani
 Can tul ti' kiu Can tul ti' ba
 Cab tumenel yx mauaye
 yx mac uhol Cab

tree of Master of Macaw Jaguar Madness."
 This will be the dialogue when speaking
 to the Four Gods, those of the Four
 Directions, concerning her, the Foreigner,
 Doorkeeper of the Earth.

Vpe dit mo tan los yom nit
 tan los y ah octan los y pen
 lech charit lacix uchi
 ma u lo lacix nel hahac
 yom u chi lay bin alabac
 lay kumpet ti than Cuhio
 pot laalic lae u hachetel
 than lae katz bin pes bat
 Yax hun ahau hunucan
 ahau bin kin hun ahau
 bin akab uch ci chab

To entrap Macaw Madness, or Convulsive
 Madness, or Master of Traveler's Madness,
 when the fever is high, and the mouth is
 affected but not the teeth, and when foam
 gushes from the mouth, this should be
 spoken, this particular incantation. Begin
 by saying what follows, which is the best of
 the incantations. Tobacco will be the trap:

"Original One Lord, one and only Four
 Lord would be the day, One Lord would be
 the night when there was chaos,

²⁶
 uch ci jihil tu Canhebucan
 ml u chi ci Canheb umun
 yatil chab tamuxan cibin
 yalabal ten Cluba chu cer
 kin CexbaCabexe Cat thaner
 chab cibin yalabal huobe
 cibin ba Cabobe bahunuhan
 chi Caa thianab cibinu
 than kin cibinu thanbaab
 bobe uuc tue ma chan cibin
 yalabal ten Cluba chu tech
 chabe kio ko cibin uhanathan
 cibin uhan chibala yaba an x
 kio ti Caan ix kio himunyat

when there was birth. The sky was divided
 in four, the clouds were divided in four
 while chaos was held back," this will be
 the dialogue. "I always fall in your trap, you
 gods, you Directions, when you invoke
 chaos," this will be the dialogue with the
 gods, the Directions. What a lot of grum-
 bling there is when one invokes them! For
 invoking the gods, invoking the Directions,
 seven times are not enough. This will be the
 dialogue: "I always fall in your trap, stop
 telling lies," this will be the tough talk, the
 grumbling. "What pains you? It is her, the
 thrush in the sky, the thrush in the clouds.

²³
 Vmekenba Cin kin'ich ka
 ki mo. yal ba cin ka ki tan
 chel chac upe tan kin'ich
 upe tan u. Casih' he ti xim
 ni tu Coo tu tan han la ha
 lac noc ka lac tu hol ya Com
 tun uchi' u si hi' u chi' chab
 tabal Cen u du bal Cen ya
 ban uchi' u si hi' u chi' chab
 Cibin ya tabal. cha Cat han
 te ma. cech uo he chab
 pu nabu chi' u si hi' u chi'
 chab chac tan pa le u matil
 baxu uas ba yak uchi'

Who is his father? Sun-Eyed Fire Macaw.
 Who is his mother? Fire-Bellied Rainbow.
 Red was the sun's halo, red was the moon's
 halo when he was born. He cracked corn
 with his beak, he was right side up or upside
 down in the hole of the foundation stone
 when his birth occurred, when his change
 occurred. I was his shelter, I was his cover
 when his birth, his change occurred," this
 will be the dialogue. "Red Macaw Acacia,
 you bore the sign of the red dove when his
 birth occurred, his change occurred. The
 red-bellied carrier brings the omen. What
 meaning is hidden beneath his tongue?

²⁴
 bal he ku xai bin ya ki cha
 Cal lukub tot' bin u Co si hom
 takin bin u uich hul bil lac
 pet bin u mac uxi Cin la
 ual kabit hool bin u cho
 chel jipit kabin yit ti
 yil'ah si hi' ti yil'ah chab
 Cibin ya tabal Can chah kik
 Can chah olon rupach kab
 bal te kabal tun tu le vah
 tu ham Cu chi' cha Cal ku
 xub tu ham Cu chi' tu yil'ah
 jihil tu yil'ah chab tu chi' ah
 potz uchi' si hi' tupel tah xol

One foot was on top of the other, they say.
 His tongue was as red as a sated knife, they
 say. The soapberry pit was golden, they say.
 A tortilla was pierced by an arrow, they say.
 His eardrum, his ear canal was open, they
 say. At the end of his gut was a finger ring,
 they say, when he saw his birth, saw his
 change," this will be the dialogue. "Four drops
 of blood, four drops of gore were on the
 wooden disk, the stone disk. He tasted them
 with his tongue, took them in his mouth,
 took the red achiote in his mouth, when he
 saw his birth, saw his change, he bit the cord
 when his birth occurred, he stripped the bark

off the staff, he bit the buttonwood tree when his birth occurred. He will be thrown to Red Pawahtun Thunderstorm's place, where he took the mixed blood, the source of his strength, where he took his collection of fires, the source of his strength, where the burning occurs. I hereby destroy him, I hereby cut through him," this will be the dialogue. "His wings will be here when the injury occurs, when the cut occurs. Then a breeze will enter, fanned by the door of the house. His spine will be severed here, when the cut occurs. Then he will enter the woods, the corral. Such is the drama. I am finished cutting, so enough," this will be the dialogue.

³⁰ upic chin tabal bin ye nal
yx hun ahau — 2
Amen

"He will be thrown into the place
where she is, One Lord _____
Amen."



25 The Alphabet Arrives in the Highlands

IN 1520, THE MAYANS of the Guatemalan highlands experienced what was called *ri nima kamik ch'ak* in K'iche', "the great death from pustules," or simply *ri yawab'il*, "the sickness." This was a smallpox epidemic, coming six years after the "great fever" had arrived in Yucatán.

The events that led to the Spanish military invasion of the highlands began on the Pacific coastal plain of Chiapas and Guatemala. On that plain was the boundary between Soconusco, the easternmost province of the Aztec empire, and the westernmost reach of the kingdom of the K'iche' Mayans. The Aztecs had pushed the boundary of Soconusco farther east than it had been at the height of K'iche' power, but after the Aztec capital at Tenochtitlán fell to Cortés in 1521, the K'iche' began to push in the opposite direction. Local lords in Soconusco asked for help from Cortés, who answered by sending a military expedition under the command of Pedro de Alvarado. The Spaniards were accompanied by their Nahuatl-speaking allies from the kingdom of Tlaxcala, just as they had been when they triumphed at Tenochtitlán.

When Alvarado advanced into what is now Guatemala in 1524, K'iche' forces made three major attempts to stop him. The first battle took place where the Río Samalá crosses the coastal plain. From there, Alvarado turned northward and began his ascent into the highlands, and the second battle took place in a mountain pass. The third battle, and the one that resulted in the heaviest K'iche' losses, took place in a high valley in the upper reaches of the Samalá, near the citadel of Xelajú Kej, "Under Ten Deer." Today the second-largest city in Guatemala stands near the battlefield, and as with many other places in Guatemala, its official name is the one given to it by Alvarado's Nahuatl-speaking allies: Quetzaltenango. But most Guatemalans, whether Mayan or not, call it by a shortened version of its K'iche' name: Xelaju, or just Xela.

When the lords of the K'iche' kingdom learned that their army had been defeated at Under Ten Deer, they decided to make peace. They invited Alvarado to come to the city of K'iche', where they had their palaces in a citadel that was given the name Uatlán by the Tlaxcalans, but whose K'iche' name was Q'umark'a'j, "Old Camp." Ranking first and second among the lords who received Alvarado at the citadel were Oxib' Kej and B'elejeb' Tz'i', "Three Deer" and "Nine Dog," named for their days of birth on the divinatory calendar. They headed a council of lords from twenty-four royal houses.

Alvarado turned the peace conference into a trial, taking Three Deer and Nine Dog prisoner and removing them to open ground outside the citadel. There he accused

is an authorial monologue in the third person. Clearly, the alphabetic version of the long account is not a verbatim transcription from a text in the prior writing system. Instead, the authors chose to record the spoken words of a performer, one whose skills went far beyond the ability to read aloud. By making this record, they sought to avoid not only the loss of an ancient text but also the loss of the words of the interpreter of that text. On both counts, their worries were well founded. Books in the prior writing were likely to be confiscated and destroyed if discovered, and oral performances could only be held in secret.

Most of the characters and events in the long account are absent from the alphabetic works of Yucatán, but they are well represented in the Classic vase paintings of the rainforest. Among the characters are twin brothers whose names, Jun B'atz' and Jun Chowen, or "One Monkey" and "One Artisan," refer to the same day on the divinatory calendar. B'atz' is the term for the howler monkey in all Mayan languages, and it is the name of a day in all of those languages except Yukatek. Chowen is similar to Chuwen, the Yukatek name for the same day, which means "artisan." Classic paintings sometimes give one or both brothers the facial features of a howler monkey, and the long account includes an episode in which both of them are transformed into monkeys. Their main occupations, according to both sources, are writing and carving, and the long account mentions flute playing and singing as well.

At certain moments in the long account, it sounds as if the narrator were looking at a pictorial narrative of the kind that could have served as the source for the scenes on Classic Mayan vases, especially the ones that feature the hero twins Jun Ajaw and Yax B'alam, "One Lord" and "First Jaguar." The names of their K'iche' counterparts, Junajpu and Xb'alanq'e, are not as easily translated. Junajpu could originate in a combination of *juna*j, which means "unique," with *ajpub'*, the term for "blowgunner." Xb'alanq'e, which carries the diminutive prefix *x-*, seems to combine *b'alam*, "jaguar," with *q'el*, which is a term for "sun" in some K'ichean languages but not in K'iche' itself. Hereafter, I will refer to them as Hunahpu and Xbalanque.

An episode in which Hunahpu and Xbalanque encounter a monstrous bird named Wuqub' Kaqix, or "Seven Macaw," could have been based on a painted scene like the one in figure 66. "This is the great tree of Seven Macaw, a nance," says the narrator, as if pointing at the left side of the painting, "and this is the food of Seven Macaw. In order to eat the fruit of the nance he goes up the tree every day." Then the hero twins enter the scene: "Since Hunahpu and Xbalanque have seen where he feeds, they are now hiding beneath the tree of Seven Macaw." In the painting, First Jaguar, the lowland equivalent of Xbalanque, is hiding. He is behind the tree, with only his jaguar forepaw showing (just beneath the fruit on the right side of the tree). "And when Seven Macaw arrived, perching over his meal," the story goes on, "it was then that he was shot by Hunahpu." In the painting, the bird has perched in the tree and One Lord, the equivalent of Hunahpu, has shot a pellet from his blowgun (the black dot just beyond the muzzle). The scorpion beneath the tree may have played a role in the Classic version of

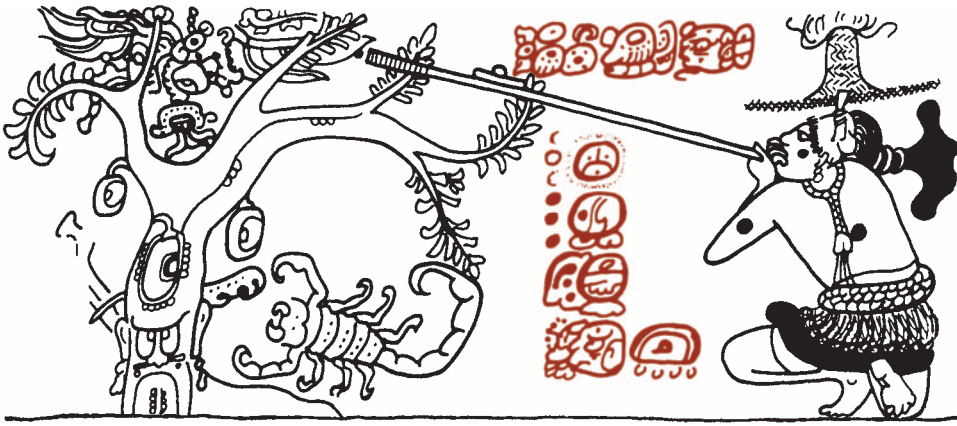


Fig. 66. The hero One Lord, the lowland equivalent of One Hunahpu in the Popol Vuh, shooting a macaw in a tree. From a Late Classic painting on a chocolate-drinking vessel.

this episode, but vase paintings sometimes combine elements from more than one episode. The hero twins of the long account do encounter scorpions, but not while they are dealing with Seven Macaw.

An episode that comes near the end of the adventures of Hunahpu and Xbalanque accounts for the nature of the divinatory day whose K'iche' name is Junajpu, equivalent to Ajaw in lowland texts. It takes place after the twins have avenged the death of their twin fathers, whose calendar names are dates complete with number prefixes: Jun (One) Junajpu and Wuqub' (Seven) Junajpu. The twins go to the grave of the father with the number seven and exhume his remains, thinking to put him back together and bring him back to life. "He had wanted his face to become just as it was, but when he was asked to name everything, and once he had found the name of the mouth, the nose, the eyes of his face, there was very little else to be said. Although his mouth could not name the name of each of his former parts, he had at least spoken again." At one level these words refer to the skeletal state of their father's face, which no longer gives him an individual identity. But at another level, they can be read as the origin story of the logographic day sign whose lowland reading would be Ajaw. Step by step, the narrator assembles "the mouth, the nose, the eyes" of the face of the day sign:



If this interpretation is correct, then the K'iche' were using the same sign for the day Junajpu that other Mayans were using for Ajaw. If, instead, they had been using Aztec or Mixtec signs for this day, then the image the father left behind as his memorial would have been that of a flower.

The twins leave their father at his grave, but they promise him that "you will be prayed to here" and that "you will be the first to have your day kept by those who will be born in the light, begotten in the light," meaning future human beings. In this way,

they establish the custom of honoring the dead on days named Junajpu, which is followed by the K'iche' to this day.

At the same time that this story accounts for the origin of a day sign and the veneration of ancestors, it can also be read as a parable about the relationship between speech and writing. In effect, the narrators are saying that even the dead can speak, at least to the extent that written words can be given voice. But visible though the written words of the dead may remain after they themselves have decayed, it is not in the power of such words to reconstitute the full presence of living faces. Written signs are skeletal remains of the past.

The long account follows the story of the twins with that of the founding lords of the K'iche' kingdom and the subsequent history of that kingdom. In two different generations, the lords renew their royal status by going on a long pilgrimage to a city that has the status of a Tulan, a "Place of Cattails." The description of the earlier pilgrimage, which includes some words from a Ch'olan language, fits a possible visit to Copán, whereas the description of the later pilgrimage, which includes Yukatek and Nahuatl words, is consistent with a visit to Chichén Itzá. The later pilgrims return home with *utz'ib'al Tulan*, "the writing of Tulan," and by means of the words contained in this writing, they tell the story of their journey. They could have brought back a book resembling the pictorial histories of Mixtec dynasties, which include accounts of pilgrimages to cities whose place signs include cattails.



Fig. 67. Mixtec place sign pierced by darts, indicating that the place in question has been conquered. Detail from the Codex Zouche-Nuttal.

The writers of the alphabetic version of the long account sound as though they are looking at a pictorial history of the Mixtec kind when they tell the story of the K'iche' conquest of a series of fortified towns on the Pacific piedmont. "Projectiles alone were the means for breaking the citadels," they say, and "all at once the earth itself would crack open." In Mixtec histories, the place signs for towns that have been conquered are pierced by weapons. In the example in figure 67, the bell-shaped element is the sign for a mountain, and this mountain (which corresponds to a town) has been broken or cracked open by three darts.

DIVINATORY ALMANACS IN THE HIGHLANDS

It is difficult to say exactly where the authors of the alphabetic Popol Vuh stop quoting from the long account, but there comes a point where the voice of the account itself gives way to the voice of the authors who described it before they began quoting from it many pages earlier. Instead of adding more episodes to the story of the K'iche' kingdom, the authors enter into a general description of the way in which its affairs were

ARE V XE OHER

Bih varal quiche vbi.

Varal xchica h'bah vi xchica-
 h'guiba vi oher h'ih, v'haribab,
 v'xenabal puch ronohel xben,
 pahna m' quiche, ramac qui-
 chevinac; arecut xchicacm
 vi v'cufumzaxic, v'calahobiza-
 xic, v'bihoxic puch v'ua xibell
 zaguiribal rumal hacol b'fol
 alom, gaholom quibi' hun ah-
 pu v'uch, hun ahpu v'hu, za-
 qui'mac h'ij, tepen, qucu m'ag
 v'gux ch'v, v'gux palo, ah ra-
 xalae, ah raxa hel chu gha-
 xic, rachbi'x'ic, rach h'ihoxic
 v'ij'ijom, mamom x'p'ja'ic,
 xmucane v'bi, m'aganol chu

**ARE' UXE' OJER TZIJ,
WARAL K'ICHE' UB'I'.**

Waral xchiqatz'ib'aj wi,
xchiqatikib'a wi ojer tzij,
utikarib'al,
uxenab'al puch ronojel xb'an pa tinamit K'iche'
ramaq' K'iche' winaq.

Are k'ut xchiqak'am wi:
uk'utunisaxik,
uq'alajob'isaxik,
utzijoxik puch
ewaxib'al,
saqirib'al rumal Tzaqol,
B'itol,
Alom,
K'ajolom, kib'i Junajpu Wuch',
Junajpu Utiw,
Saqinim Aq,
Sis,
Tepew Q'ukumatz,
Uk'ux Cho,
Uk'ux Palo,

Ajraxa Laq,
Ajraxa Tzel, chucha'xik, rachb'ixik,
rachtzijoxik ri lyom,
Mamom,

Xpiyakok,
Xmukane, ub'i' Matzanel,
Chuqenel,
kamul lyom,
kamul Mamom, chucha'xik pa K'iche' tzij.

Ta xkitzijo ronojel
ruk' xkib'an chik, chi saqil k'olem,
saqil tzij.

Wa'e xchiqatz'ib'aj chi upam chik uch'ab'al Dios,
pa christianoil chik.

Xchiqelesaj rumal maja b'i chik ilb'al re Popol Wuj,
ilb'al saq petenaq ch'aqa palo
utzijoxik qamujib'al,
ilb'al saq k'aslem, chucha'xik.

K'o nab'e wujil,
ojer tz'ib'am puch,
xa ewal uwach ilol re,
b'isol re.

**THIS IS THE ROOT OF THE ANCIENT WORD,
HERE IN THIS PLACE CALLED K'ICHE'.**

Here we shall inscribe,
 we shall implant the Ancient Word,
the potential,
the source for everything done in the citadel of K'iche',
 in the nation of K'iche' people.

And this shall be our theme:
the demonstration,
revelation,
and account
of how things were put in shadow,
brought to light by the Maker,
 Modeler,
 Bearer,
 Begetter, names of Hunahpu Possum,
 Hunahpu Coyote,
 Great White Peccary,
 Coati,
 Resplendent Plumed Serpent,
 Heart of the Lake,
 Heart of the Sea,

Plate Shaper,
Bowl Shaper, as they are called, also named,
 also described as the Midwife,
 Matchmaker,

Xpiyakok,
Xmukane, names of the Defender,
 Protector,
 twice a Midwife,
 twice a Matchmaker, as is said in the words of K'iche'.

They accounted for everything
 and did it, too, with a clear state of mind,
 in clear words.

We shall write about this now amid the preaching of God,
 in Christendom now.

We shall reveal it because there is no longer a way to see the Council Book,
 a way to see the light from beside the sea,
 the story of our shadows,
 a way to see the dawn of life, as it is called.

There is the original book
and ancient writing,
but hidden is the face of the reader,
 interpreter.

ARE UTZIJOXIK WA'E:

THIS IS THE ACCOUNT:

TA XWINAQIR K'U RI ULEW KUMAL,

AND THEN THE EARTH AROSE BECAUSE OF THEM,

.....

..



27 Blood Moon Becomes a Trickster

THE MASTERS OF CEREMONIES wait until they are more than halfway through the Popol Vuh before they tell the story of the fourth attempt to make the human work, the human design. Meanwhile, they tell a series of stories about gods who rid the earth of monsters and live the lives of flesh-and-blood beings, establishing precedents for human customs.

Xpiyakok and Xmukane, the first of all daykeepers, have two sons with the first of all calendar names, One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu. As Andrés Xiloj Peruch pointed out, their two day numbers stand for all thirteen numbers, because the sequence of the numbers that attach to a given day name, as that name recurs each twenty days, begins with 1 and ends with 7: 1, 8, 2, 9, 3, 10, 4, 11, 5, 12, 6, 13, and 7. One and Seven Hunahpu play ball every day, using a court on the surface of the earth. In an episode that precedes the one that unfolds here, they are summoned to play a game on the home court of opponents whose calendar names are One Death and Seven Death (Jun Kame and Wuqub' Kame), standing for all days named Death. These two characters are the principal lords of the underworld realm of Xibalba (Xib'alb'a), whose name connotes fear. In order to play ball with them, One and Seven Hunahpu must first pass a series of tests. They fail completely, and as a consequence they are sacrificed.

The bodies of the brothers are buried near the underworld ball court, at the Place of Ball Game Sacrifice, but the head of One Hunahpu is separated from his body. On the orders of One and Seven Death, it is placed in a tree near the burial place. The tree then bears fruit for the first time, and as time goes by, no one can distinguish the head from the fruit. This event marks the origin of the calabash tree (*Crescentia cujete*), which bears fruit in the shape of a human head, with a rind that is hard and thin like a skull. The inhabitants of Xibalba begin to talk about the tree, which is where the present story begins. A lord named Blood Gatherer (Kuchumakik') tells his daughter about the tree. Her name, translated here as "Blood Moon," combines the feminine or diminutive prefix *x-* with *kik'*, the term for "blood," which contains a pun on *ik'*, "moon." She is destined to be a moon goddess, but as the story opens, she has yet to see the surface of the earth and is yet to be seen by anyone who lives there.

When Xiloj read this story, he was struck by the scene in which Blood Moon comes face-to-face with the skull in the tree. She sees the skull spit in her hand, but when she looks in her hand, she finds no trace of saliva. The skull explains, "It's just a sign I've given you." At this point, Xiloj remarked, "Then this is a dream." The contemporary

K'iche', especially the daykeepers, treat dreams as sources of important information. A dream in which a skull spits in the dreamer's hand would be read as a sign of something to come, even if the skull does not speak.

As dreamers, daykeepers value a state of lucidity, in which the dreamer is aware of being in a dream. When daykeepers find themselves face-to-face with another being in a dream, they pay close attention, expecting to receive a message. In her encounter with the skull, Blood Moon becomes the first of all lucid dreamers. She is so attentive that her dream becomes self-explanatory. The skull, speaking with the voice of One and Seven Hunahpu, delivers a speech on the subject of human mortality, explaining that in the future, the dead will live on through their daughters and sons. The flesh of their faces may decay, depriving them of the visible aspect of their individual identity, but the faces of their descendants will resemble their own, in both the physical and social senses. The social "faces" or identities of the living, as determined by their occupations and their inherited places in a hierarchy, will be a continuation of the "faces" of the dead.

Blood Moon returns to her home as the first of all pregnant women. The saliva (or sign) she received in her hand has generated the hero twins in her belly, Hunahpu and Xbalanque. Her pregnancy proceeds by the measure of months, as befits a moon goddess. Her father, Blood Gatherer, notices her condition when six months have passed, and the number six sets another precedent. Mayans reckoned synodic months in groups, and the most common group lasted 177 days, equal to three months of 29 days

each and three of 30 days each. When Blood Moon's father accuses her of bearing a bastard, she defends herself by saying, "There is no man whose face I've known." Her statement is misleading, but it is literally true: the skull in the tree is without a recognizable face. This clever statement reveals a side of Blood Moon's character that will later cause Xmukane to call her a *k'axtok'*, a "trickster." Her counterpart in the Classic art of the lowlands is often portrayed with a rabbit that shares the moon with her (figure 69). The rabbit plays its own role as a trickster in Classic paintings of scenes from stories and in a later episode in the Popol Vuh.

The literature on mythology is full of references to male trickster figures, but in Blood Moon, we have a female example. By means of trickery, she outwits the greatest authority figures a woman can face. Her first major challenge comes when her angry



Fig. 69. Moon goddess seated in a crescent moon, holding a rabbit. Detail from an incised Late Classic vase.

**WA CHI K'UTE UTZIJOXIK JUN Q'APOJ,
UME'AL JUN AJAW, KUCHUMAKIK' UB'I'.**

Are k'ut ta xuta' jun q'apoj,

ume'al jun ajaw,

Kuchumakik' ub'i' uqajaw,

Xkik' k'ut ub'i ri q'apoj.

Ta xuta k'ut utzijoxik ri uwach che',

ta chitzijox chik rumal uqajaw,

chumayjaj k'ut ta chitzijoxik:

—Ma kina'ojwila ri che' kab'ixik.

Qitzij kus uwach, kacha',

kanuta'o,— xcha' k'ut.

K'ate xb'ek xa utukel,

xopon k'ut chuxe' che' tikil,

chi Pusb'al Cha'j tikil wi.

—Jiya'? Naki pe uwach wa'e che'?

Maki pa kus chiwachin wa che'?

Ma kikam taj,

ma kisach taj la k'i ta xchinch'up junuq,— xcha' k'u ri q'apoj.

Ta xch'aw k'ut ri b'aq k'o ula xo'l che':

—Naki pa karayij chi re ri xa b'aq

ri k'olok'oxinaq chu q'ab' taq che'?— xcha' ri ujolom Jun Junajpu
ta xch'awik chi re ri q'apoj.

—Ma karayij,— xucha'xik.

—Kanurayij,— xcha' k'ut ri q'apoj.

—Utz b'a la.

Chalikib'a uluq ri awikiq'ab,

wila na,— xcha' ri b'aq.

—We,— xcha' k'u q'apoj.

Xulikib'a aq'anoq uwikiqab' chuwach b'aq.

K'ate k'ut chi pitz kab'an uchub' b'aq,

ta xpetik taqal k'ut puq'ab' q'apoj.

Ta xril k'ut upuq'ab',

jusuk' xunik'oj,

ma k'uja b'i uchub' b'aq puq'ab'.

—Xa retal mixnuya' chawe ri nuchub',

nuk'axaj.

Are ri nujolom maja b'i kachokon chi wi,

xa b'aq,

maja b'i chi uch'aq'.

Xawi k'eje ujolom we ki nim ajaw:

xa utyojil utz wi uwach.

Are k'ut ta chikamik, chuxib'ij chi rij winaq rumal ub'aqil.

K'eje k'ut xa uk'ajol k'eje ri uchub',

uk'axaj,

uk'oje'ik we uk'ajol ajaw;

we puch uk'ajol na'ol,

ajuchan.

**AND HERE IS THE ACCOUNT OF A MAIDEN,
THE DAUGHTER OF A LORD NAMED BLOOD GATHERER.**

And this is when a maiden heard of it,
the daughter of a lord.

Blood Gatherer is the name of her father,
and Blood Moon is the name of the maiden.

And when he heard the account of the fruit of the tree,
her father retold it,
and she was amazed at the account:

"I'm not acquainted with that tree they talk about.
Its fruit is truly sweet, they say,
so I hear," she said.

Next, she went all alone,
and arrived where the tree stood;
it stood at the Place of Ball Game Sacrifice.

"What? Well, what's the fruit of this tree?
Shouldn't this tree bear something sweet?

They won't die,
they won't be wasted if I pick one," said the maiden.
And then the bone in the fork of the tree spoke:

"Why do you want a mere bone,
a round thing in the branches of a tree?" said the head of One Hunahpu
when it spoke to the maiden.

"You don't want it," she was told.

"I do want it," said the maiden.

"Very well.

Stretch out your right hand here,
so I can see it," said the bone.

"Yes," said the maiden.

She stretched out her right hand there, in front of the bone.

And then the bone spit out its saliva,
which landed squarely in the hand of the maiden.

And then she looked in her hand,
she inspected it right away,
but the bone's saliva wasn't in her hand.

"It's just a sign I've given you, my saliva,
my spittle.

This, my head, has nothing on it—
just bone,
nothing of meat.

It's just the same with the head of a great lord:
it's just the flesh that makes his face look good.

And when he dies, people get frightened by his bones.

After that, his son is like his saliva,
his spittle,
in his being, whether it be the son of a lord
or the son of a craftsman,
an orator.

Xmachisach wi chib'ek
chitz'aqatajik.

Mawi chupel
ma pu ma'ixel uwach ajaw,
achij
na'ol,
ajuchan.

Xaxi chikanajik ume'al,
uk'ajol.

Ta chuxoq!
K'eje mixnub'an chawe.
Kataq'an k'ut chila' chuwach ulew, mawi kakamik.
Katok pa tzij.

Ta chuxoq!— xcha' ri ujolom Jun Junajpu,
Wuqub' Junajpu,

xawi kina'oj ta xkib'ano.
Are utzij Jun Raqan,
Ch'ipi Kaqulja,
Raxa Kaqulja chi kech.

K'eje k'u utzalijik chik q'apoj chi rochoch,
k'ya pixab' xb'ix chi rech.
Jusu k'u xwinaqir ral chi upam rumal ri xa chub',
are k'ut kiwinaqirik Junajpu,
Xb'alanq'e.

Ta xopon k'ut chi rochoch ri q'apoj, xtz'aqat k'ut waqib' ik',
ta xnawachil rumal uqajaw,
ri Kuchumakik' ub'i' uqajaw.

K'ATE PUCH UNATAJIK Q'APOJ RUMAL UQAJAW, TA XIL RI RAL K'O CHIK,

ta xkikuch k'ut kina'oj konojel ajawab',
Jun Kame,
Wuqub' Kame ruk' ri Kuchumakik':

—Are ri nume'al k'o chi ral, ix ajawab'.
Xa ujoxb'al,— xcha' k'u ri Kuchumakik' ta xoponik kuk' ajawab'.
—Utz b'ala.

Chak'oto uchi' ri.
Ta ma kub'ij chi pus k'ut,
chi najt chib'epusu' wi.—
—Utz b'a la, alaq ajawab',— xcha' k'ut.

K'ate k'ut xutz'onoj chi rech ume'al:
—Apa ajchoq'e ri awal, k'o chapam at nume'al?— xcha' k'ut.
—Maja b'i wal, lal nuqajaw;
maja b'i achij, weta'm uwach,— xcha' k'ut.
—Utz b'a la.

Qitzij wi chi at joxol!
Che'k chipusu, ix ajpop achij.
Chik'ama' uloq ri uk'ux chi upam tzel,

The father does not disappear when he passes,
when he reaches his end.

Neither dimmed
nor destroyed is the face of a lord,
a warrior,
craftsman,
orator.

Rather, he will leave his daughters,
his sons.

So be it!
This is what I have done through you.
Now go up there on the face of the earth, you will not die.
Keep the word.
So be it!" said the head of One Hunahpu,
Seven Hunahpu—
they were of one mind when they did it.
This was the word Hurricane,
Newborn Thunderbolt,
Sudden Thunderbolt had given them.

In the same way, by the time the maiden returned to her home,
she had been given many instructions.
Right away children were generated in her belly from the saliva alone,
and this was the generation of Hunahpu,
Xbalanque.
And when the maiden got home and six months had passed,
she was found out by her father,
Blood Gatherer is the name of her father.

**AND AFTER THE MAIDEN WAS NOTICED BY HER FATHER,
WHEN HE SAW THAT SHE WAS NOW WITH CHILD,**

thoughts were shared by all the lords,
One Death,
Seven Death, together with Blood Gatherer:
"This daughter of mine is with child, lords.
It's just a bastard," Blood Gatherer said when he joined the lords.
"Very well.
Get her to open her mouth.
Then, if she doesn't tell, sacrifice her.
Go far away and sacrifice her."
"Very well, your lordships," he replied.
After that, he questioned his daughter:
"Who is responsible for the child in your belly, my daughter?" he said.
"There is no child, my father, sir;
there is no man whose face I've known," she replied.
"Very well.
It really is a bastard you carry!
Take her away for sacrifice, you Warriors of the Council.
Bring back her heart in a bowl,

TA XUL K'UT RI IXOQ XKIK' RUK' RI UCHUCH JUN B'ATZ',
JUN CHOWEN,

AND BLOOD MOON CAME TO THE MOTHER OF ONE MONKEY,
ONE ARTISAN



28 The Death of Death

LIKE THEIR FATHERS before them, Hunahpu and Xbalanque are summoned to play a ball game with the lords of Xibalba. Unlike their fathers, they pass the tests that stand in the way of playing the game. Again and again they survive by outwitting their hosts, but the most important part of their deception concerns their identity. The boys never reveal the fact that they are the children of One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu, who suffered death at the hands of One and Seven Death. As for their mother, Blood Moon, the Xibalbans believe her to be dead as well, thanks to the artificial heart she crafted as a substitute for her own.

Before each game, Hunahpu and Xbalanque are sent to a different house of horror to spend the night. The first house is filled with impenetrable darkness; the second, with knives that want something to cut; the third, with cold drafts and falling hail; and the fourth and fifth, with hungry jaguars and killer bats. The game itself is full of dangers, and when visiting players are on the losing side, they forfeit their heads. In one game, Hunahpu's head serves as the ball, but he is able to play because Xbalanque has fitted him with an artificial head made from a squash. Xbalanque regains possession of the real head with the help of a rabbit, who lures the home team off the court by hopping like a bouncing ball.

The underworld events in the episode presented here begin with the fifth and final game. This one is not a ball game but something more like a broad-jump competition. The Xibalbans prepare a stone-lined pit for roasting the hearts of maguey plants, the first stage in making the alcoholic beverage *ki'*, the "sweet drink." They challenge Hunahpu and Xbalanque to compete with them in jumping over the fire pit. The twins know that they will be burned in this pit, so they concern themselves with the fate of their remains. They also know that the Xibalbans will consult seers before they do anything with the remains, so they conspire with the seers. There are two of them, and they "see into the middle" by looking into water. Their names, Xulu' and Pak'am (hereafter Xulu and Pacam), offer a clue as to what will happen to the remains, but the Xibalbans fail to take notice. The names are from a Ch'olan language, and together they mean something like "catfish are sown."

When Hunahpu and Xbalanque are burned in the pit, the Xibalbans follow the instructions the seers give them, grinding the bones of the twins into flour and then sprinkling the flour into a river. The boys reappear in the water after five days, a length of time that signals the transition between one solar year and another. At first, they look like catfish, having germinated from the flour "sown" in the river by the Xibal-

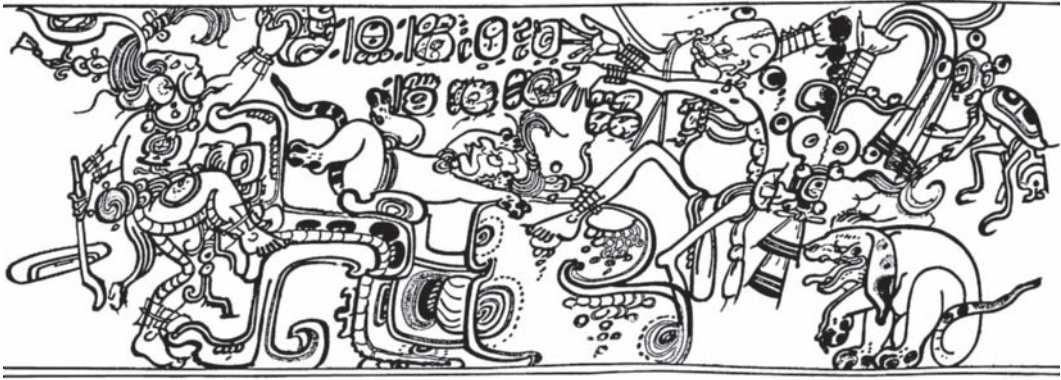


Fig. 70. Rollout view of a scene from the adventures of the Mayan hero twins, from a Late Classic drinking vessel. In disguise are One Lord (at left) and First Jaguar (on his back). To the right are a lord of Death (dancing), a dog (wagging his tail), and a firefly (above the dog).

bans, but the following day, they come out of the water as boys. Dressed in rags, they take on the role of itinerant entertainers, performing masked dances and putting on magic shows. Now their identity is doubly concealed. The Xibalbans had no idea who they were in the first place, and now they have no idea that they have returned.

When the lords of Xibalba hear about the boys' performances, they invite them to their palace to put on a show. They send the invitation through messengers, but it is not directly addressed by the senders to the receivers. Here, as elsewhere in the *Popol Vuh*, messengers do not speak in the voice of the first-person senders of a message when they address the recipients. Instead, they report what they heard the senders saying *about* the recipients. In the same way, when the town criers of present-day K'iche' communities deliver an announcement on behalf of the mayor, they report what they heard him saying about a matter of interest to the community rather than speaking to the community in his voice.

The show the boys put on for the lords of Xibalba is the subject of a number of Classic vase paintings, one of which is shown in figure 70. Their most famous act, according to the authors of the *Popol Vuh*, is one in which they take turns at sacrificing each other and then bringing each other back to life. The authors describe the sacrifice of Hunahpu by Xbalanque in detail, but the painter of the present vase has made the opposite choice, creating a scene in which Yax B'alam, or "First Jaguar," the Classic equivalent of Xbalanque, is sacrificed by Jun Ajaw, or "One Lord," the equivalent of Hunahpu.

As in other paintings of their performances, One Lord and First Jaguar are partially disguised. They have features that conceal their identity from the lords of Xibalba, but they also have features that reveal their identity to the viewers of the painting. One Lord, standing at left, is costumed as Chaak, or "Thunderstorm," but the catfish barbel on his face offers a clue to his actual identity. In his right hand he holds a lightning-striking ax, and the object in his upraised left hand represents a cloud. Directly in front of him is First Jaguar, who wears the elderly face of a Pawahtun but whose actual iden-

tity is revealed by his infantile body and his jaguar paws and tail. He lies on top of a stone altar, ready to receive a sacrificial blow from his brother's ax, but instead of being held down, he eagerly spreads his arms wide.

The authors of the Popol Vuh describe the audience reaction to the sacrifice of Hunahpu by Xbalanque, saying that "the lords were happy, as if they were doing it themselves." The vase painter interprets the reaction to the sacrifice of First Jaguar by One Lord in the same way. To the right of the altar, a skeletal lord of Death does a joyful dance. As if he himself were performing the sacrifice, he mirrors the posture of One Lord, except that he has already brought his right arm forward. Behind him is another eager observer, a dog with both forepaws lifted and a wagging tail. If the Classic story unfolded in the same way as the one in the Popol Vuh, this dog would be the one the boys sacrificed and brought back to life at an earlier stage in their performance.

The insect that hovers above and behind the dog is a firefly, holding a torch in one hand. In the painting, he provides the lighting for the scene, which is taking place in the shadowy underworld, but if the Classic story were like the one in the Popol Vuh, he would have played a role in an earlier episode as well. When Hunahpu and Xbalanque were sent to spend the night in the house full of darkness, they were given cigars that they were told to keep lit all night without consuming them. They solved this problem by putting fireflies at the tips of the cigars, which made them appear to be burning. The next morning, they returned the cigars intact to their dismayed hosts. Thus, the firefly in the painting could be in the same position as the dancing lord of Death, not knowing that he has already had an encounter with the two entertainers.

Hunahpu and Xbalanque put on a show of great humility when they first arrive at the palace of One and Seven Death, but as their hosts become increasingly entranced by their performance, the brothers become bolder. Instead of following the protocol of a royal court, they use familiar address, as when they replace *lal ajam*, which has the effect of "your lordship," with *at ajam*, translated here as "thou lord." When One and Seven Death volunteer to be sacrificed and brought back to life, the boys not only use *ix*, the plural of the second-person familiar pronoun, but they also make a pun on the name Death (Kame). As if to reassure One and Seven Death that the sacrifice will do them no harm, they say, *Ma pa ix k'o kam?* "Aren't you already dead?" Considering what is about to happen to them, they are as good as dead.

**ARE K'UT WA'E KINAB'AL,
KIKAMIK JUNAJPU,
XB'ALANQ'E.**

Are wa kinab'al,
kikamik xchiqab'ij chik.

Ta xepixab'aj k'ut,
xkib'ano ronojel k'axk'ol,
ra'il xb'an chi ke.

Mawi xekamik rumal utijob'al Xib'alb'a,
mawi xech'akatajik rumal ronojel tiyonel chikop k'o chi Xib'alb'a.

K'ate k'ut ta xkitaq chi ka'ib' nik'wachinel,
k'eje ri e ilol.

Are k'ib'i wa: Xulu',
Pakam.

E eta'manel.

—We kojz'onoxik chi we kumal rajawal Xib'alb'a
rumal ri qakamik.

Kina'oj kakinuk' rumal ri mawi mixojkamik,
ma pu mixojch'akatajik,
mixqasach kitijob'al,
ma xa chikop chok chi qe.

Are k'u retal wa chi qak'ux:
chojim ab'aj kamisab'al qe kumal.

Mixekuchu kib' ronojel Xib'alb'a.

Ma k'u qitzij ta kojkamik?

Are k'u ina'oj wa' xchiqab'ij:

We kixultz'onob'exoq kumal chi rech qakamik,
ta koj'atoq.

Naki xchikuchaj ix Xulu',
ix Pakam. We kecha' chi we,

—Ma utz lo chiqatix ta kib'aqil pa siwan?

—We man b'a utz

xawi xere chik chik'astaj kiwach,— kixcha'.

—We ba' are utz xa chiqaxekeb'a chuwi che'?— ta kecha' chik chi we.

—Xax ma utz wi,

xawi xere chiwil chi kiwach!— kixcha'.

Ta kecha' ki k'ut chi roxmul:

—Xa b'a re rutzil:

Xa chiqatix kib'aqil pa raqan ja'.— We k'ut kixuchax chik kumal:

—Are utz b'a la kekamik!

K'ate k'u utz chijok kib'aqil chuwach ab'aj;

k'eje ri chike'x k'ajim jal;

jujunal k'u chike'ik.

K'ate k'u chitix ub'ik chi raqan ja',

chi ri qaj k'wa',

chib'e ch'uti juyub'

nima juyub',— kixcha' k'ut.

**AND HERE IS THE EPITAPH,
THE DEATH OF HUNAHPU,
XBALANQUE.**

Here is the epitaph,
the death we shall name for them.

Just as they were instructed,
they went through all the dangers,
the troubles that were made for them.

They did not die from the tests of Xibalba,
they were not defeated by all the voracious animals that inhabit Xibalba.

After that, they summoned two who see into the middle,
similar to readers.

Here are their names: Xulu,
Pacam.

They are knowers.

"Perhaps there will be questions from the lords of Xibalba
about our death.

They are thinking about how to overcome us because we haven't died,
nor have we been defeated,
we've exhausted all their tests,
not even the animals got us.

So this is the sign, here in our hearts:

Their instrument for our death will be a stone oven.

All the Xibalbans have gathered together.

Isn't our death inevitable?

So this is the plan we shall name for you:

Perhaps you will come to be questioned by them about our death,
once we've been burned.

What will you say, dear Xulu,
dear Pacam? If they ask you:

'Wouldn't it be good if we dumped their bones in the canyon?'

'Perhaps it wouldn't be good,
since they would only come back to life again,' you will say.

'Perhaps it would be good if we just hung them up in a tree,' they'll say to you next.

'Certainly that's no good,
since you would see their faces,' you will say.

And then they'll speak for the third time:

'Well here's the only good thing:

We'll just dump their bones in the river.' If that's what they ask you next:

'This is a good death for them!

And it would also be good to grind their bones on a stone,
in the same way hard corn is refined into flour,
and refine each of them separately.

And then spill them into the river,
sprinkle them on the water's way,
among the small mountains,
great mountains,' you will say.

CHI ROB'IX K'UT XEK'UTUN CHIK,
XE'IL CHI YA' RUMAL WINAQ,

AND ON THE FIFTH DAY THEY REAPPEARED,
THEY WERE SEEN IN THE WATER BY THE PEOPLE,



29 The Human Work, the Human Design

AFTER COMPLETING THE STORY of Blood Moon and her sons, Hunahpu and Xbalanque, the authors of the Popol Vuh return to the problem of the creation of human beings. The Makers and Modelers first conceived “the human work,/the human design” at the very beginning, when they raised the earth out of the primordial sea. But then, after three experiments, they came no closer to realizing their idea than making the wooden people who became monkeys. Now comes their fourth try, and this time the material they choose for the human body is yellow and white corn. Xmukane, the grandmother of Hunahpu and Xbalanque, grinds the corn nine times, making a very fine dough that becomes human flesh, and the water in which she washes her hands becomes human fat.

To give shape to the material provided by Xmukane, the gods use their genius and their cutting edge, just as they did when they brought the mountains and rivers into being. They model four beings with legs and arms and with twenty digits. Their creations turn out to have perfect vision, and when they look around, they are able to see all the way to the limits of space and time without moving from where they are.

From the beginning, the gods had wanted to create beings with whom they could enter into dialogue. They had given a language lesson to the animals they created on their first try, but the animals had responded with nothing but shrieks and howls. The mud person who came next had said nothing, and the wooden people, though they talked at first, had forgotten to speak to those who made them. In the passage presented here, the gods try to open a conversation with the people made of yellow and white corn, but this time they get more than they expected rather than less. Not only do these new people speak when spoken to, but they answer with a poetic tour-de-force. They recognize the gods as their creators by giving them “double thanks,/triple thanks,” thus playing off form against meaning by making “double” and “triple” into a pair. They produce many pairs of parallel lines, which are central to Mayan poetics, but in each case, they abbreviate the wording of the second of the two lines, smartly doing more with less. On the only occasion when they fill in the full wording of parallel lines, they produce a quatrain instead of a couplet: “We speak,/we listen,/we wonder,/we move.” And after all their play with form, they end their speech by addressing the gods not as “our mother,/our father,” as their descendants will do when they pray, but as “our grandmother,/our grandfather.” This choice of words has the effect of reducing the authority of their makers.

On top of everything else, the first four humans declare that they have already understood everything “in the sky, / on the earth.” The gods are taken aback by this performance, and somehow, despite the far-reaching awareness of their latest creations, they manage to hold a private conversation about what to do with them. They decide to “take them apart just a little,” clouding their vision so that they can see only what is nearby. At the same time, they decide that humans will multiply—and, implicitly, that birth will be followed by death.

In this episode, as at the beginning of their work, the authors of the *Popol Vuh* tell a story whose points of contrast with *Genesis* are clear. As in *Genesis*, mortality is imposed on humans after they have been created, but not because of something they did wrong. The first four ancestors did not acquire knowledge by disobeying the gods but were rather deprived of knowledge by gods who did not wish them to come too close to a divine level of greatness.

The gods “took back their knowledge” and withdrew to a distance, and they have stayed at a distance ever since. They no longer engage in face-to-face conversations with the beings they made so perfectly and then marred. Now, instead of speaking plainly to humans, they send messages by way of signs in the sky, or by way of the ominous cries or sudden movements of animals, or in dreams that are difficult to understand, or in the enigmatic outcomes of divinations. The only way humans can ask for these messages or reply to them is to pray and make offerings. When the messages do come, the discovery of their meaning requires an art of interpretation. Such is the human condition.

Ta xetz'onox k'ut rumal ri Ajtz'aq,

Ajb'it:

—Jucha li kik'ojey kina'o?

Ma kixmukunik?

Ma kixta'onik?

Ma utz ich'ab'al

ruk' ib'inib'al?

Kixmukuna na k'ut,

chiwila' uxe' kaj.

Ma q'alaj juyub'taq'aj kiwilo?

Chitija' na k'ut! — xe'ucha'xik.

K'ate puch xk'iskil ronojel uxe' kaj.

K'ate k'ut kik'amowanik ri chi re Tz'aqol,

B'itol:

—Qitzij wi chi kamul k'amo,

oxmul k'amo!

Mixojwinaqirik,

mi pu xojchi'nik,

xojwachinik!

Kojch'awik,

kojta'onik,

kojb'isonik,

kojsilab'ik.

Utz kaqana'o,

xqetamaj naj,

naqaj,

mi pu xqilo nim,

ch'uti'n upa kaj,

upa ulew.

K'amo k'ut chi we, mixojwinaqirik, oj tz'aq,

oj b'it!

Mixojuxik, at qati't,

at qamam! — xecha',

ta xkik'amowaj kitz'aqik,

kib'itik.

Xk'isketamaj ronojel,

xkimukuj kaj tz'uq,

kaj xukut upam kaj,

upam ulew.

Ma k'u utz xkita'o ri Ajtz'aq,

Ajb'it:

—Mawi utz ri mixkib'ij qatz'aq,

qab'it:

—Mixqetamaj ronojel nim,

ch'uti'n. — kecha'.

K'eje chi k'ut uk'amik chik kina'oj Alom,

K'ajolom:

—Jucha chik chiqab'an chi ke?

And then they were questioned by the Builder,
and Mason:

"What do you know about your being?
Don't you look?
Don't you listen?
Isn't your speech good,
and your walk?
So you must look,
to see out under the sky.
Don't you see the mountain-plain clearly?
So try it," they were told.
And then they saw everything under the sky perfectly.
After that, they thanked the Maker,

Modeler:

"Truly now, double thanks,
triple thanks!
We've been formed,
and we've been given our mouths,
we've been given our faces!
We speak,
we listen,
we wonder,
we move.
Our knowledge is good,
we've understood what is far
and near,
and we've seen what is great
and small under the sky,
on the earth.
Thanks to you, we've become human, we are made,
we are modeled.
We have come into being, our grandmother,
our grandfather," they said,
when they gave thanks for having been made
and modeled.
They understood everything perfectly,
they sighted the four sides,
the four corners in the sky,
on the earth.
But this didn't sound good to the Builder
and Sculptor:
"What our works
and designs have said is no good:
'We have understood everything, great
and small,' they say."
And so the Bearer,
Begetter took back their knowledge:
"What should we do with them now?"

Xa ta naqaj chopon wi kimukub'al.
 Xa ta sqaqi'n uwach ulew chikilo.
 Mawi utz ri kakib'ij.
 Ma pa xa tz'aq,
 xa b'it, kib'i'?
 Xa lab'e e kab'awil ke'uxi chik,
 we mawi kepoq'otajik,
 kek'iritajik, ta chawaxoq,
 ta saqiroq,
 we mawi chik'iyarik.—
 —Ta chuxoq:
 Xa qayojo chi sqaqi'n chik,
 k'ochi karaj.
 Mawi utz kaqana'o.
 Xa pa xchijunamataj kib'anoj quk',
 ri najt kopon wi ketamab'al,
 kilon ronojel— xe'ucha'xikik rumal Uk'ux Kaj,
 Juraqan,
 Ch'ipi Kaqulja,
 Raxa Kaqulja,
 Tepew Q'ukumatz,
 Alom,
 K'ajolom,
 Xpiyakok,
 Xmukane,
 Tz'aqol,
 B'itol, ke'ucha'xik.
 Ta xkib'an k'ut uk'oje'ik chik kitz'aq,
 kib'it.
 Xa k'u xwab'ax ub'aq kiwach rumal ri Uk'ux Kaj.
 Xmoyik k'eje ri xuxlab'ix uwach lemo,
 xmoyomob'ik ub'aq kiwach.
 Xa naqaj chik xemukun wi,
 xere chi q'alaj ri e k'o wi.

 K'eje k'ut usachik ketamab'al
 ruk' ronojel kina'ob'al e kajib' chi winaq.
 Uxe' utikarib'al.

Their vision should at least reach nearby.
 They should see at least a small part of the face of the earth.
 What they're saying isn't good.
 Aren't they merely 'works'
 and 'designs' in their very names?
 Yet they'll become as great as gods,
 unless they procreate,
 proliferate at the sowing,
 the dawning,
 unless they increase."
 "Let it be this way:
 Now we'll take them apart just a little,
 that's what we need.
 What we've found out isn't good.
 Their deeds would become equal to ours,
 just because their knowledge reaches so far,
 they see everything," so said the Heart of Sky,
 Hurricane,
 Newborn Thunderbolt,
 Sudden Thunderbolt,
 Sovereign Plumed Serpent,
 Bearer,
 Begetter,
 Xpiyakok,
 Xmukane,
 Maker,
 Modeler, as they are called.
 And when they changed the nature of their works,
 their designs,
 it was enough that their eyes be marred by the Heart of Sky.
 They were blinded as the face of a mirror is breathed upon,
 their vision flickered.
 Now they could see only what was nearby;
 only what was right in front of them was clear.

 In this way, their understanding was lost,
 along with all the knowledge of the first four humans.
 The root was implanted.

The rest of the Popol Vuh is devoted to human history. The main actors are the founders of the ruling lineages of the K'iche' kingdom and their descendants. At first, they wander in the darkness of a great forest, but eventually they and their descendants shine with fiery splendor, building citadels filled with palaces and temples and expanding the boundaries of their domain. The authors devote considerable attention to the military successes of K'iche lords, but they also describe them as going on long retreats inside temples, where they fast, let blood, and pray for their subjects.

Like their ultimate ancestors, the first four humans, the lords of the K'iche' kingdom were able to see into distant places and times without moving from where they were. But unlike the first four humans, they could not do so just by looking out into the world around them. Rather, they overcame the limits of human vision by studying something that was right in front of them: "the original book and prior writing," the instrument for seeing that preceded the alphabetic work now known as the Popol Vuh.

At the end of the Popol Vuh, the authors bring the story into their own time by listing the names of successive lords of the K'iche' kingdom, beginning with the founders. They focus on the two highest-ranking lordships, both of which belonged to the Kaweq division of the K'iche' nation. The Ajpop, or "Councilor," was first in rank, followed by the Ajpop K'amja, or "Councilor for the Treasury," who was responsible for collecting tribute. The authors do not name all the lords who once held these titles, limiting themselves to thirteen generations. Some of the generations they omitted are accounted for by other K'iche' authors who made different choices on their way from the founding generation to their own times. To this day, thirteen generations is the ideal for prayers addressed to ancestors.

When the authors of the Popol Vuh arrive at the twelfth generation on their list, they name Three Deer and Nine Dog, commenting that "they were ruling when Tunnatiuh arrived," meaning Alvarado, and adding that "they were tortured by the Castilian people." They do not mention that Three Deer and Nine Dog were burned after they were tortured. In the thirteenth place are Tekum, or "Black Butterfly," and Tepetul, who "were tributary to the Castilian people." Their reign ended when Alvarado had them hanged for sedition, but the authors say nothing about that. Finally, in fourteenth place, come names of a new kind, the names adopted by the lords who were alive when the authors did their writing. For them, the Councilor is Don Juan de Rojas, and the Councilor for the Treasury is Don Juan Cortés.

The responsibilities of the Councilor for the Treasury included the collection of tribute, and in 1557, Don Juan Cortés went all the way to Spain to reclaim tribute rights for the descendants of K'iche' lords. He continued to press his case when he returned to Guatemala in 1558, prompting a missionary to warn Philip II that "this land is new and not confirmed in the faith," and that Cortés, "son of idolatrous parents, would need to do very little to restore their ceremonies and attract their former subjects to himself." Tribute rights never were restored, but over the next thirty years, Cortés did take a considerable role in appointing and installing the leaders of various towns that had once been under K'iche' rule. The Cortés line died out by 1788, but the Rojas line still lives. Its members retained the right to hold serfs until 1801, when Spain instituted liberal reforms throughout its empire. Today, the descendants of Don Juan de Rojas plant their fields near the entrance to the ruins of the former K'iche' capital.



30 We Saw It All, Oh My Sons

FOR MUCH of their history, the lords of the Kaqchikel and Rab'in al nations were tribute-paying allies of the lords of the K'iche' nation, and the warriors of all three nations went on campaigns together. That relationship came to an end during the early fifteenth century, when a K'iche' faction of dissatisfied veterans raised a rebel army. Instead of working to expand the outer limits of the territory controlled by the allies, the rebels expanded K'iche' territory at the expense of the allies. The Kaqchikel lords, who had been residing in a citadel not far south of the K'iche' capital, were forced to move farther away, to the southeast. They established a fully independent kingdom and built its capital at a place named Iximche', or "Corn Tree," a term for the breadnut tree (*Brosimum alicastrum*).

During the late fifteenth century, the lords of the Xajil division of the Kaqchikel nation began recording their history according to intervals that followed a strictly vigesimal count of days. Instead of using periods of 360 and 7,200 days like those of Yucatán, they used periods of 400 and 8,000 days. The zero date for their count, rather than being a backward projection into a hypothetical era that preceded human existence, was a turning point in their own history.

Two rulers held sway at Corn Tree, both of whom held the title of Councilor, which is Ajpo (rather than Ajpop) in the Kaqchikel language. They represented two divisions of the Kaqchikel nation, Xajil and Sotz'il. The first name carries connotations of dancing, and the other, which means "of the bats," may indicate an ancient connection to Copán, whose emblem glyph had a bat's head as its main sign. Today, some Kaqchikel men wear a jacket with a bat insignia on the back.

A generation or so after the founding of Corn Tree, an internal power struggle arose among the Kaqchikels. The lord of the Tuquche' division of the nation, who envied the power of the Xajil and Sotz'il lords, staged a massive revolt on the divinatory day 11 Cane (11 Aj), corresponding to May 20, 1493, on the Julian calendar then in use in Europe. The revolt was put down the same day, which then became the zero point for the annals kept by the Xajils. Each period of 400 or 8,000 days ended on a day named Cane, but with a variable number.

Around the middle of the sixteenth century, an alphabetic version of the annals was created by Francisco Hernández Arana, the son of a Xajil lord who had survived the smallpox epidemic that preceded the Spanish invasion and lived long enough to receive the name Francisco. The alphabetic version is not a direct transcription from one

- **Twelve Cane marked seventeen years since the act of revolt.**
- **Nine Cane then marked eighteen years since the revolt.**

- ¶ During this year birds passed through, doves came out of the woods, and on Three Set, the doves passed through the town of Corn Tree, the birds were truly terrifying. _____
- ¶ In the fifth score of days, after the doves came out of the woods, locusts passed through: on Two Wind they passed through the town, the locusts were truly terrifying long ago. _____
- ¶ In the ninth score of days Corn Tree burned, on Four Death the town was consumed by fire. Our grandfather Lord One Wind was not there, but on the other side of the river; our fathers and grandfathers were not there when the town burned, but we saw it all, oh my sons. _____

- **Eight [Six] Cane marked nineteen years since the revolt.**

- ¶ During this year Forest People were killed on Bat River by your grandfathers; many great men gave themselves up when they made war there. _____
- ¶ Again, Forest People were devastated; when Hidden Tree was entered at the corner of the colonnade by the Forest People, many of the great men of their council, along with the Warrior Councilman, gave themselves up there, and many of lesser rank died; many prisoners were taken and brought in by your grandfathers. _____

- **Three Cane marked a score of years since the death of the Tuquches who rose in revolt.**

And then Thirteen Cane marked another year.

- ¶ During the year the Pole Dance was celebrated on the pyramid by Lord Ten Thought, on Eight Yellow the two parts of the fortress were joined together; the lords made a truly glorious display there, all the seven nations arrived; One Wind and Ten Thought scattered fire; your grandfathers, Warrior Councilman Jaguar, Warrior Councilman Iq'ich, along with Warrior Minister Net, were making war. _____

Marking

- **Marking the [twenty-]second year since the revolt was Ten Cane.**

¶ During this year Forest People were again killed by our fathers, our grandfathers, who did it with lightning cuts and strikes; two divisions of warriors met the Forest People, and then Yaxon K'iq, the son of Lord Councilor Sweatbath, gave himself up, and many other great men gave themselves up, and so your grandfathers achieved fiery splendor, oh my sons; many prisoners came in throughout the great war of which we have been speaking. _____

- **Seven Cane marked the third in the second score since the revolt.**

- **Four Cane then marked [twenty-]four years since the revolt.**

¶ During the [twenty-]fifth year, that was when the illness began, oh my sons; first came the coughing sickness, then the illness with a bloody nose and dark yellow urine; the death that passed through long ago was truly terrible. And so Lord Six Sinner died, and little by little a great darkness, a great night, came over our fathers, our grandfathers, oh my sons, when they were sickened by the pox. _____

- **One Cane marked a score and five since the revolt. Time of the pox.**

¶ During this year, they were sickened by the pox, and so death brought an end to our fathers, our grandfathers, Diego, Juan. On Five Cane our grandfathers entered into war with Panatacat, even though the illness of the pox had begun. The death that came over the people was truly terrible, since the people could not rid themselves of the illness.

¶ It was two score days after the illness began that our father, our grandfather died, on Twelve Death, Lord One Wind died, your great-grandfather. _____

¶ And only two days later our father, Warrior Councilman Jaguar, your grandfather, oh my sons, also died. Your grandfather died together with his father; there must have been a stench, a stink from all the dead people; when our fathers and grandfathers died, half the people ended up falling into the canyons, then dogs and vultures just devoured the people, the death was terrible; once your grandfather was dead, the lord's son and his younger and elder brothers also died, and so we were left behind as

or-

orphans, oh my sons, and this was when we were small boys, when all of us were left this way. _____ The damage to the lineage. _____

- **The names of ancestors who were the sons of lords.**

¶ Warrior Councilman Jaguar is the name of the eldest son of Lord One Wind, who was next in line for glory before the lords when the great death of the pox arrived. _____

¶ Ajmaq is the name of the second son, and his son is Don Pedro Solís./Tojin is the third son, who had no descendant when he died with the lord. Three of our fathers died. _____

¶ And our father Francisco, Warrior Councilman Tz'i'an, is the fourth son. _____

¶ Jaguar is the fifth son, and left no descendant. _____

¶ Messenger Hunahpu is the sixth son, and these three fathers of ours were spared from the pox. And we were all small when we were left together, we saw all the illness, oh my sons; and this is the name of our grandmother, the first wife of Lord One Wind: Turkey Corn Tassel is the name of the lady, who gave birth to three sons, and they are our father, and the father of Don Pedro Solís, and the one who had no sons, Tojin; and when the Lady Turkey Corn Tassel died, Lady Black Vulture of the House of Birds arrived, who was the mother of Warrior Councilman Tz'i'an and of Jaguar, her only two children. _____

¶ And in the fifth score of days after the lords One Wind and Ten Thought had both died, Four Lefthanded and Nine Net took the lordship, they took it on One Snake, but the only one who actually ruled was Nine Net, who was spared; and we were all alone then, we children; not one of our fathers was spared, and Tz'i'an and Jaguar were also small, all of us who descended from Lord One Wind, and so Nine Net came to rule, but for just one year as Minister of the Reception House, since it was said that the Lord Herald B'ak'ajol did not want him to rule. Nine Net entered into lordship, but the Lord Herald B'ak'ajol wanted our father Warrior Councilman Tz'i'an to enter the lordship instead, and so he entered his lordship. _____

- **And now this is during the [twenty-]sixth year.**

¶ One score days after they took the lordship there was a revolt against the House of Birds,
on

on Ten Deer they did it; the lords of the House of Birds and Cypress House came to seek aid at Corn Tree because of the revolt, they came to recruit warriors. _____

- ¶ And just twelve days later Tz'utujil people were killed by the Sotz'ils and Tuquche' on Eleven Lefthanded, the Tz'utujils were done to death, the people of the House of Birds were devastated, a crowd of prisoners was taken, and so, fearing death, the Tz'utujils handed over jade and metal; the town of Xepoyom was brought down. _____
- Right away, Lord Tepepul of the House of Birds and the lord of Cypress House went back down to their homes. _____

- ¶ When all the people of Under Red Rock were uprooted, they came to seek the aid of the Kaqchikels; many of the Tz'utujils came to the town long ago, wanting to make war against the people of the House of Birds and Six Place, wanting to make an alliance because of warriors who were subverted by the people of Six Place. _____
- ¶ On Nine Monkey, death was brought upon the banner stone at Sapote Place; none of the great warriors were left. The men of Nine Net and Four Lefthanded did it by themselves. _____

- **Eleven Cane marked a score and six years since the revolt.**

- ¶ It had been one year since our fathers and grandfathers were devastated by the death pox.
- ¶ During the year we married your mother, oh my sons, when it was one year since your grandfathers had died; on Twelve Thunder we took a wife. _____

- **Eight Cane marked the [twenty-]seventh year since the revolt.**

- ¶ During the year the war with the Forest People cooled down, in its eleventh year the Forest war cooled down. _____

- **Five Cane marked a score and eight years.**

- **The arrival of the Castilian People at Under the Sapote.**

- ¶ It was during the year after this that the Castilian people arrived; it was the ninth year
of the

of the second score when the Castilian people arrived at Under the Guanacaste, Under the Sapote; on One Yellow, Forest People were killed there by Castilian people. Tunatiuh Adelantado was the name of their lord, who brought down all the nations; they were of unknown identity in the time when wood and stone had their days. _____

¶ And when he arrived at Under Ten, the Forest People were devastated, all the Forest People who were drawn out to meet the Castilian people died there, the Forest People were devastated in front of unfortunate Under Ten. _____

¶ And as soon as he arrived at the citadel of Old Camp, he was met by the lords Councilor and Councilor of the Reception House, then tribute was paid by the Forest People, but then the lords were submitted to torture by Tunatiuh. _____

¶ On Four Net, the lords Councilor and Councilor of the Reception House were burned by Tunatiuh; in war, there was no mercy for anyone in the heart of Tunatiuh. / And then a messenger from Tunatiuh came to the lords, sent to demand warriors: "Let the warriors of the Councilor for the Sotz'ils and the Councilor for the Xajils come here to kill Forest People," the messenger of Tunatiuh said to the lords. Immediately the word of Tunatiuh was carried out, and five times eighty warriors went to kill the Forest People, since only people from the town went; he did not ask the lords for all the warriors, and the warriors went only three times to extract tribute from the Forest People, and we ourselves went to collect it for Tunatiuh, oh my sons. _____

• **How he then came here to Corn Tree** ~~~~~

And it was on One Hunahpu that the Castilian people arrived at Corn Tree, with their lord named Tunatiuh, and Tunatiuh went straight to meet the lords Nine Net and Four Left-handed, and Tunatiuh was of good heart toward the lords when he arrived at the citadel, there was no war, Tunatiuh was simply happy when he arrived at Corn Tree, and this is how the Castilian people arrived long ago, oh my sons; they were truly frightening when they arrived, their identity was unknown and they seemed like icons to the lords. And so they seemed to us, your fathers. We actually saw them when they came to Corn Tree; Tunatiuh slept in Skull Rack House until the next day, and that lord dreamed of being frightened by warriors who came to him in his sleep, and he sent for the lords: "For what reason would you make war on me? What am I doing to you?" he said. "Not for any reason; this happened because many warriors have died here, and you saw them impaled on the rack," said the lords; then he entered the home of Lord Planter. _____

then



31 The Count of Days

AMONG THE ALPHABETIC WORKS produced in the Guatemalan highlands during the colonial period is a K'iche' manuscript that not only records information from a prealphabetic work but also follows the original format. Because most of its pages are organized in a way that bears a direct resemblance to pages in the Dresden and Madrid codices, it has been named the K'iche' Codex. It was written in 1721–22 and was subsequently confiscated by priests in Xela, who found it in the possession of a K'iche' choir-master who had been jailed for practicing as a traditional healer. He escaped before they could question him about his manuscript.

The K'iche' Codex has two sections, the first of which opens with these words: *Wa'e chol poal q'ij, masewal q'ij, qojcha chi rech*, "Here is the sequence of the tally of days, the indigenous days, as we speak of them." There follows a description of five consecutive K'iche' years of 365 days each, beginning during the Gregorian year 1722 and ending during 1727. The divisions of these years, consisting of 18 periods of 20 days each and a final period of 5 days, are correlated with the days of the divinatory calendar, the days of the week, and the months of the Gregorian year. Figure 71 shows the first seven days in the account, with the Mayan part of the information highlighted in red. The first entry, with its orthography updated and its abbreviations undone, begins with this sentence: *9 Kej k'ut mixeqan 20 q'ij Nab'e Mam*, "9 Deer, then, has brought the 20 days of First Grandfather." The lord of the day 9 Deer, as the bearer of the new year, is the current holder of the title of First Grandfather, which also serves as the

* 9 <i>queh gut mixekā 20^{ih} nabemē</i>	d	mayo	3
10 <i>Sanil</i>	e		4
11 <i>toh</i>	f		5
12 <i>4'ij</i>	g		6
* 13 <i>Bag</i>	A		7
1 <i>ce</i>	b		8
2 <i>ah</i>	c		9

Fig. 71. The first seven days from an account of a Mayan 365-day year that began on the divinatory day 9 Deer are in red; the corresponding days from the Julian calendar are in black. From the K'iche' Codex.

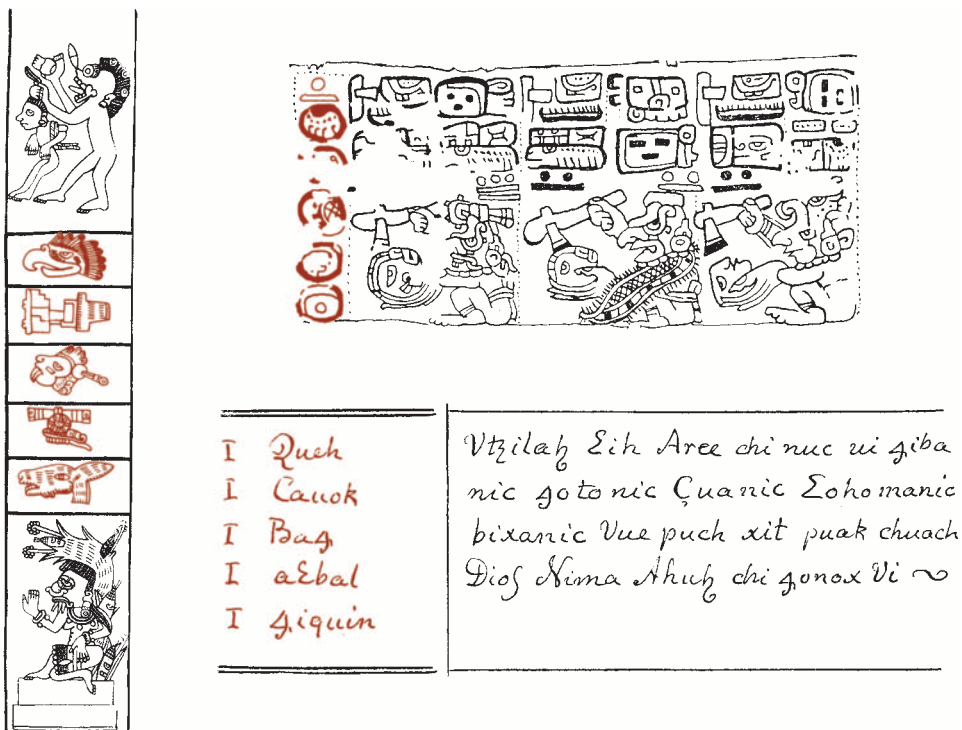


Fig. 72. Groups of five divinatory days spaced fifty-two days apart, from the Borgia (left), Madrid (upper right), and K'iche' (lower right) codices. The day names are highlighted in red; the pictures and texts in black give the corresponding auguries.

rated from the list by intervals that place them at later dates (as in the Dresden lunar and Thunderstorm almanacs we saw in chapters 16 and 18).

Both the Dresden and Madrid codices have numerous five-day almanacs, but they neither follow one another in a systematic temporal scheme, nor do they exhaust all 52 possible combinations of five evenly spaced days. The Borgia Codex, in contrast, arranges columns of five days like the one in figure 72 so as to produce a consecutive series of days if one reads across them while staying in the same row. Reading all five rows across all of the fifty-two columns produces a complete series of 260 days. In the K'iche' Codex, 260 days are accounted for by 52 five-day almanacs like the one shown in the same figure. They are arranged four to a page on a total of thirteen pages. A consecutive reading of the days is possible, but the reader must follow a different route to achieve it. The almanacs on a given page occupy four different registers, as they do in figure 73 (at right). The day 3 Tribute (3 Toj), which comes first in the almanac on the first register of this page, is followed by the day that comes first in the almanac on the second register, which is 4 Dog (4 Tz'i'). Next come 5 Monkey (5 B'atz') and 6 Tooth (6 E'), followed by the dates listed first in the almanacs on subsequent pages. A reader wishing to continue a consecutive reading after reaching the last page would then return to the first page and begin looking for the days that come second in each almanac, and so forth.

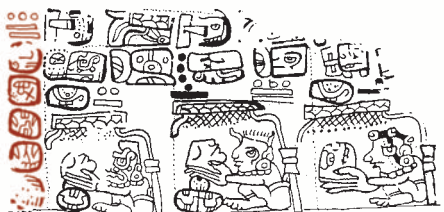
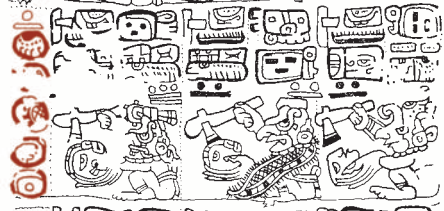
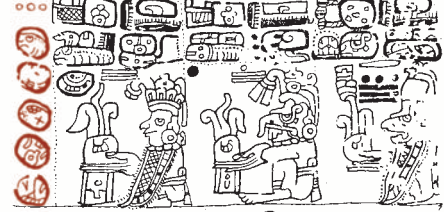
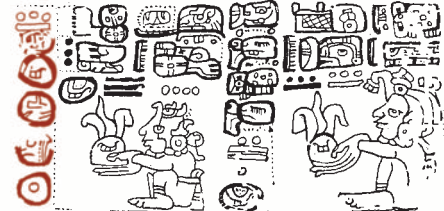
	3 <i>Toh</i> 3 <i>ymox</i> 3 <i>Ah</i> 3 <i>Can</i> 3 <i>Xoh</i>	Katzih vtzilab Eih chaom Eih gonobul gaz lem chuach Dios Xime aiauh roo yichal Vae Eih ~
	4 <i>Aji</i> 4 <i>yE</i> 4 <i>yix</i> 4 <i>Queme</i> 4 <i>Tihax</i>	Katzih ytzel Eih royo Val Eih mana vtzilab Eih ta roo yichal
	5 <i>bag</i> 5 <i>aEbal</i> 5 <i>Aiquin</i> 5 <i>Queh</i> 5 <i>Cauok</i>	Katzih Couilah Eih royo Val Eih roo yichal ~
	6 <i>ee</i> 6 <i>gat</i> 6 <i>Ahmak</i> 6 <i>Sanil</i> 6 <i>hunahpu</i>	Katzih ytzel Eih Ucohom Uchayl Ukul ba kil holomal Uuach V yabilal roo yichal Vae Eih ~

Figure 73. Groups of five divinatory days spaced fifty-two days apart, arranged in four groups to a page in the Madrid (left) and K'iche' (right) codices. The day names are highlighted in red; the pictures and texts in black give the corresponding auguries. Note the similarity of proportions in the spaces devoted to auguries.

Some of the Madrid pages are like the K'iche' pages in being divided into four registers, as shown in figure 73 (left). The proportions of the spaces devoted to auguries are similar on the pages in the figure, but the spaces devoted to dates on the K'iche' page (at right) have been widened to accommodate alphabetic writing. The height of the Madrid registers is about an eighth of an inch greater than that of the K'iche' registers (the illustration shows the Madrid page at a smaller scale), but the registers on Dresden pages that are divided into four parts are equal in height to the K'iche' registers (two inches). Figure 74 shows registers from these two codices at the same scale. The similar proportions of the Madrid and K'iche' spaces devoted to auguries, together with identical heights of the Dresden and K'iche' registers, suggest that the K'iche' Codex, or an alphabetic manuscript that preceded it, was written side by side with a nonalphabetic original. The first alphabetic version could have served as an aid to readers with an incomplete understanding of the original text and pictures. Copies of that version could have served as substitutes for the original, and, as time went by, revised versions could have been created by writers who had never seen the original.

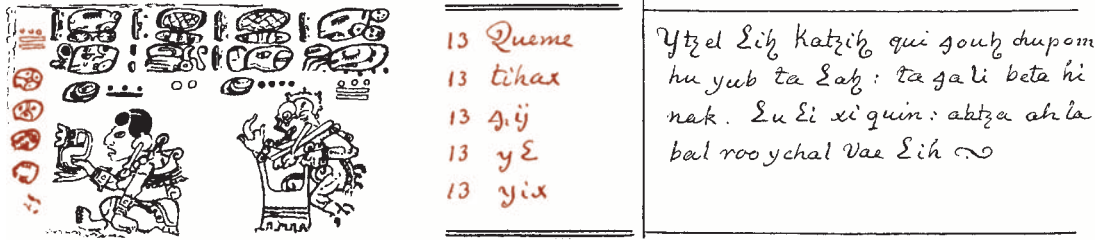


Fig. 74. Groups of five divinatory days spaced fifty-two days apart, from the Dresden (left) and K'iche' (right) codices, shown to the same scale (the original height of each is two inches). The day names are highlighted in red; the pictures and texts in black give the corresponding auguries.

The first of the two series of almanacs in the K'iche' Codex includes Christian content that could have been introduced by the choirmaster from whom the manuscript was confiscated or by the writers of previous versions. Here is an example of an almanac with content of this kind, followed by a translation:

I	Queh	Vtz'lah E'ih Arce chinuc ui giba
I	Canok	nic gotonic Çuanic Sohomanic
I	Baq	bixanic Vae puch xit puak chuach
I	a'ebal	Diof Xima Ahuh chi gonox Vi ~
I	q'iquin	

1	Deer	Good days. These are for the practice of
1	Rain	writing, carving, flute playing, drumming,
1	Monkey	singing, and also for asking for jade and
1	Foredawn	metal before God the Great Lord. ~
1	Bird	

The positive outlook for the arts in this almanac comes from the day 1 Monkey (1 B'atz'), which occupies the middle position in the prefatory list. As we saw in chapter 27, twin brothers named One Monkey and One Artisan (Jun B'atz' and Jun Choven) were divine practitioners of the plastic and performing arts and were prayed to by human practitioners. In the almanac, their place has been taken by "God the Great Lord," but the day 1 Monkey remains as a trace of their existence.

On the next page is an illustration of a full page of almanacs from the K'iche' Codex, followed by a translation. In the second and third of these almanacs, as in the one just presented, one day in the list of five seems to be the source of the corresponding augury. In the second almanac, the day in question is the first one, 11 Dog (11 Tz'i'). Contemporary K'iche' daykeepers associate days named Dog with indecision or lack of direction, which is consistent with the ambivalence of the augury given here. In the third almanac, the key day is the middle one, 12 Bird (12 Tz'ikin). Daykeepers asso-

10	Tribute	Good days for boosting trade, for
10	Lefthanded	bearing a staff of office. Birds alight
10	Canestalk	and kick their feet. Truly good days,
10	Snake	all five of them. ~
10	Thought	
11	Dog	Strong days. But they speak of two
11	Wind	things: someone does good, does evil,
11	Jaguar	on all five of them. ~
11	Death	
11	Knife	
12	Monkey	The cries of birds. Restful days,
12	Foredawn	good days for giving alms before God
12	Bird	the Great Lord, all five of these
12	Deer	days. ~
12	Rain	
13	Tooth	Bad days. The teeth, the claws of the
13	Net	horned owl are set on all five of these
13	Sinner	days. ~
13	Yellow	
13	Marksman	

-
- | | | |
|---|------------|-------------------------------------|
| 3 | Tribute | Good days for planting, sowing. |
| 3 | Lefthanded | Dawn comes for whatever is sown. |
| 3 | Canestalk | The Great Star rises, |
| 3 | Snake | it brings the day, a beautiful day. |
| 3 | Thought | |
-



Map 19. The Great Star just above the horizon and the sun and Castor and Pollux just below it, on the morning of June 19, 1721, in the latitude of the Guatemalan highlands.

close to being on target for a rise in the general vicinity of 1722–27, the Gregorian years that receive explicit mention in the K'iche' Codex.

The five day names in this almanac are the K'iche' equivalents of the five names the Aztecs and Mixtecs assigned to eastern rises of Venus, each of which runs a day later than the names that seem to play a similar role in the Dresden Venus table. The reason for the difference may be that the Dresden dates were meant to mark the end of the period of invisibility that precedes the first eastern rise rather than the rise itself. If so, the difference would be consistent with a lowland Mayan tendency to focus on dates that mark the completion of periods, in contrast with an Aztec, Mixtec, and highland Mayan tendency to focus on beginning dates.

The pages that deal with Venus in the surviving prealphabetic codices, whether Mexican or Mayan, focus on war and death rather than planting and sowing, but the present almanac suggests that there were alternative ways to interpret Venus events. The K'iche' term for the Great Star in its morning role is *ego q'ij*, in which *ego* literally means that it carries something on its back, namely *q'ij*, “day” or “sun.” This terminology puts the Great Star in a position like that of the moon in the Dresden lunar almanacs, where Moon Woman carries a burden on her back (see chapter 16), rather than in the position it occupies in the Dresden Venus table, where it becomes a weapon in the hands of warriors. Map 19 shows the location of the Great Star as it rose above the eastern horizon (the horizontal line) on 3 Tribute, June 19, 1721, with the sun close behind. On this occasion, the Great Star was in the same position, relative to Castor and Pollux, as Moon Woman in the Dresden almanac, when her burden was a pair of ears of corn and the augury was for plentiful food and drink. If the Great Star was reckoned as an alternative carrier of such a burden, this would help explain why “dawn comes for whatever is sown” in the K'iche' almanac. In effect, this almanac is giving us an agricultural view of the Great Star rather than a military view.

Because the reappearances of Venus as the morning star take close to a century to repeat a particular divinatory date, it is clear that the second series of almanacs in the



32 Man of Rabinal

BEFORE THE SPANISH INVASION, the ruling houses of Mesoamerican kingdoms sponsored public dramatic productions that commemorated major historical events. The oldest direct evidence of Mayan dramas of this kind has been found at Dos Pilas, in two seventh-century inscriptions on the risers of a stone stairway. The earlier of the two texts concerns an attack on Tikal that drove its ruler into exile, followed by a retaliatory attack on Dos Pilas. The later text records the performance of a dance at Dos Pilas that dramatized the two earlier occurrences.

The dialogue in Mesoamerican theater was sung back and forth by two choruses, or by a single chorus that sang all the parts, while the actors danced. The early missionaries acted quickly to replace indigenous theater with productions modeled on the vernacular theater tradition of medieval Europe. In these new plays, the dialogue was spoken by the characters, and though the performances had interludes of dancing, the music was purely instrumental. Plots drew from biblical stories, the lives of saints, or the triumph of Spanish Christians over Moorish Muslims. The dialogue was scripted, and nearly all of it was in rhymed and metered Spanish verse. Local actors, whether or not they knew much Spanish, memorized their parts by repeating the lines the director of a play read aloud to them.

In the Mayan highlands, one of the most popular scripted plays to emerge during the early colonial period ran contrary to the purposes of the missionary program. It had an all-Mayan cast of characters speaking all-Mayan dialogue, and it dramatized the capture and sacrifice of a prisoner of war in a world where Europeans had no role. Mayans had never used their own writing system to dictate, word for word, what performers should say, but for this play, they created scripts using alphabetic writing. They probably took the words from the songs that choruses would have sung in earlier times. The dance music was played on Mayan instruments.

Spanish authorities, who saw the portrayal of a world without Europeans as subversive, made numerous attempts to suppress this Mayan play in numerous towns, starting in 1593 and continuing until 1770. The only town where it continues to be performed today is Rabinal, where the Achi dialect of K'iche' is spoken. The Rabinal version has two titles: Xajoj Tun, or "Dance of the Trumpet," which is the name by which some of the colonial versions were known, and Rab'inal Achi, or "Man of Rabinal." The music is provided by two long trumpets, which were once wooden but are now brass, and by a slit drum that produces three tones. The drum, like its ancient predecessors, is played with a pair of rubber-tipped sticks. Here is the cast of characters:



Fig. 75. Photo of Kaweq of the Forest People as he appeared in the 1999 production of the Rabinal Achi dance-drama (left) and a stucco relief of a lord of Palenque that dates from the seventh century (right).

other lengthy work in the entire corpus of Mayan literature, whether written in the Mayan script or in the alphabet. The last step in this process takes place during an actual performance, when the actors make small revisions that reflect their sense of the structure of the text.

The actors learn more than the words of the script from the person who teaches them their parts. He trains them to speak slowly and loudly, without fading at the ends of their lines, so that their words can be heard in an outdoor space. He also teaches them to make deliberate pauses to set off lines that are parallel except for a partial change of their wording. If the first of two lines is introduced by a phrase that is not repeated, it is framed by pauses as well, making for a total of three distinct lines. Here is

Fig. 76. The opening speech of the Rabinal Achi dance-drama as it appears in the 1913 version of the script.

.....

This page intentionally left blank

EPILOGUE

Nearly everything Mayans wrote in their own languages during the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth exists only in manuscripts, hidden away in the archives of governments and parishes, in museums and libraries, and in Mayan households. There is no lack of researchers who center their work on documents, but most of them place a greater value on earlier works.

The first person to carry out systematic research on Mayan literature was Juan Pío Pérez, himself a Mayan. He was born in Yucatán in 1798 and lived until 1859. Beginning around 1835, he began to seek out manuscripts in various parts of the peninsula, collecting some and copying others. His main purpose, as he stated it, was to understand the ancient method of computing time and to record the predictions made by ancient priests for the 7,200-day periods known as scores of stones. Among his finds was the Chilam Balam book of Maní, which was illustrated with signs for the twenty day names of the divinatory calendar (see pages 248–49) and bar-and-dot numerals. He combined information from this book and other sources in a major work that later became known as the Codex Pérez. His work has never been published except in English and Spanish translations.

In 1847, Mayans in the eastern part of Yucatán rose in revolt against non-Mayan landowners and the Mexican government, and they resisted repeated efforts to pacify them until 1901. The leaders of the revolt produced letters and proclamations, mostly written in Yukatek, in which they explained the reasons for the revolt and recorded ongoing events. These works were disseminated by handwritten copies, the only medium available to the Mayan community. Several hundred letters are preserved in archives, but only a few have been published.

In 1850, a religious movement emerged among the rebels, centered in the northern part of what is now the Mexican state of Quintana Roo. At the entrance to a cave, a wooden cross began to speak, and the place became known as Chan Santa Cruz. Through a medium named Juan de la Cruz, the words of the Holy Cross took the form of a series of letters telling the rebels what actions they should take. Today the Holy Cross resides in a chapel a short distance north of the cave in the village of X-Cacal, which was founded by the rebels.

Copies of the letters of Juan de la Cruz survive in a library in Mérida and in the keeping of the official scribes of the chapel in X-Cacal. The scribes have combined their copies with other documents to create the equivalent of a sacred book, although unlike the Bible, it has remained open to additions. The scribes expanded its contents as recently



NOTES

2

3

The divine Cormorant is *uxyajul na'*, “3 times a mother,” in my reading, and the “children” in question are the deities whom Mayanists often refer to as “the Palenque triad.” When Floyd Lounsbury discovered the triple conjunction of Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn that marked the dedication of the three temples of the Cross Group (1989a: 248), it was soon suggested that the three planets corresponded to the members of the triad (Schele and Freidel 1990: 256). The interpretation of the temple texts that I offer here is the first to connect each and every member of the triad to a specific planet.

In the Temple of the Sixth Sky (or Cross), the featured planet is Mars, and the deity whose full name I translate as “Corn Silk at the Tip of a Single Ear” is often referred to as “GI” in the Mayanist literature. The sidereal locations I suggest for “Sixth Sky House” and “8th House of Corn Silk” are based on their positions in the sequence of thirteen zodiacal signs on pages 23–24 of the Paris Codex, as numbered chronologically rather than in the staggered order in which they are presented. For more on the identification of Mayan constellations lying on or near the path of the sun, moon, and planets, see D. Tedlock and B. Tedlock 2003 and 2007 (134–49).

When the texts of the Cross Group mention the “birth” of a member of the triad, I take them to mean the eastern rise of a planet after a period of invisibility. When they mention a “delay” in the movement of a member of the triad, or that he “turned around,” I take them to refer to a time when the corresponding planet appears to cease its motion relative to the fixed stars, after which it moves in the opposite direction. A third kind of event, which always comes after a turnaround, is an arrival at *matawil*. This is generally taken to be a mythological place-name (see Stuart and Houston 1994: 73–77), but I interpret it as a term for the period of invisibility of a planet, prior to its eastern reappearance. In Ch’orti’, *ma tajwil* simply means “not encountered” or “out of reach.” Only when a member of the triad has reached this state does Cormorant go into action as a “mother,” performing a penitential sacrifice of blood and thus, in my interpretation, making it possible for one of her children to be reborn, or to reappear on the eastern horizon. In effect, the “births” of these planetary deities are always rebirths, taking their places in a repeating series of events. The inscriptions do not purport to tell the story of the first birth, first turnaround, or first arrival at invisibility of a given planet but rather call attention to examples of these three kinds of events, separated from one another by multiples of planetary periods.

In the case of Mars, the planet of Corn Silk, no birth is mentioned. The initial event in Corn Silk’s narrative, as I noted in the present chapter, is a turnaround, and the second, though it has been misinterpreted by Lounsbury (1985: 45–46) and others as his “birth,” is quite the opposite. He “arrived at invisibility” and “touched the earth,” which is to say that Mars was last seen low on the western horizon when it disappeared from the sky after a long period of visibility. For each of the other two members of the triad, a “birth” is described, but it takes place prior to a turnaround, which is followed in turn by an arrival at invisibility.

A consistent interpretation of the astronomical language of the Palenque inscriptions removes the need to imagine that they imply the existence of two deities sharing the same name as GI (Corn Silk). The case for a GI senior and a GI junior, as made by Lounsbury (1980), was accepted by Linda Schele and many others, including (for a time) myself (D. Tedlock 1992a). Lounsbury based his argument on the mistaken notion that the GI participating in the “turnaround” must be older than the GI he thought was “born” on the occasion described here as a disappearance. He found a birth date for the senior GI by producing an unusual reading of the first two sentences in the second double column of the text of the Temple of the Sixth Sky (see

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

15

16

17

22

23

24

25

27

28

29

- . 1989b. "The Royal Fifth; Earliest Notices of Maya Writing." *Research Reports on Ancient Maya Writing* 28. Washington, DC: Center for Maya Research.
- . 1992. *Breaking the Maya Code*. New York: Thames & Hudson.
- . 2005. *The Maya*. 7th ed. New York: Thames & Hudson.
- Coe, Michael D., and Justin Kerr. 1997. *The Art of the Maya Scribe*. New York: Thames & Hudson.
- Coe, Michael D., and Mark Van Stone. 2001. *Reading the Maya Glyphs*. New York: Thames & Hudson.
- Cojtí Macario, Narciso, Martín Chacach Cutzal, and Marcos Armando Cali. 1998. *Diccionario Kaqchikel*. Antigua Guatemala: Proyecto Lingüístico Francisco Marroquín.
- Collins, Sophie D. 1977. "The *Maestros Cantores* of Yucatán." In *Anthropology and History in Yucatán*, edited by Grant D. Jones, pp. 233–47. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Coto, Tomás de. 1983. *Vocabulario de la lengua cakchiquel*. Edited by René Acuña. Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.
- Craine, Eugene R., and Reginald C. Reindorp. 1979. *The Codex Pérez and the Book of Chilam Balam of Mani*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Cruz Guzmán, Ausencio, Kathryn Josserand, and Nicholas A. Hopkins. 1980. "The Cave of Don Juan." In *Third Palenque Round Table, 1978*, part 2, edited by Merle Greene Robertson, pp. 116–23. Austin: University of Texas Press. Includes a contemporary text in Ch'ol.
- Culin, Stewart. 1992. *Games of the North American Indians*. 2 vols. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Davis, L. Irby. 1972. *A Field Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Central America*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Deckert, Helmut, and Ferdinand Anders. 1975. "Kommentar." Booklet included with *Codex Dresdensis*. Codices Selecti 54. Graz, Austria: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1976. *Of Grammatology*. Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Diringer, David. 1962. *Writing*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Dzul Poot, Domingo. 1985–86. *Cuentos Mayas*. 2 vols. Mérida, Yucatán: Maldonado Editores.
- Edmonson, Munro S. 1971. *The Book of Counsel: The Popol Vuh of the Quiché Maya of Guatemala*. Middle American Research Institute Publication 35. New Orleans: Tulane University.
- . 1982. *The Ancient Future of the Itza: The Book of Chilam Balam of Tizimín*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- . 1986. *Heaven Born Mérida and Its Destiny: The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- . 1997. *Quiché Dramas and Divinatory Calendars*. Middle American Research Institute Publication 66. New Orleans: Tulane University.
- Fahsen, Frederico. 2001. "From Chiefdoms to Statehood in the Highlands of Guatemala." In *Maya: Divine Kings of the Rainforest*, edited by Nikolai Grube, pp. 87–95. Cologne: Könnemann.
- Fash, William L. 1991. *Scribes, Warriors, and Kings: The City of Copán and the Ancient Maya*. New York: Thames & Hudson.
- Fash, William L., and Barbara W. Fash. 2000. "Teotihuacan and the Maya: A Classic Heritage." In *Mesoamerica's Classic Heritage: From Teotihuacan to the Aztecs*, pp. 433–63. Boulder: University Press of Colorado.

- Hernández. 2004. *Ri ch'ab'al ke ri qat'i'qamaam: El rezo de nuestros antepasados en Rabinal*. Rabinal, Baja Verapaz: Museo Comunitario Rabinal Achi.
- Jones, Grant D. 1994. "European Writing in the Paris Codex." Appendix in *The Paris Codex: Handbook for a Maya Priest*, by Bruce Love, pp. 105–6. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- . 1998. *The Conquest of the Last Maya Kingdom*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Jones, Tom. 1985. "The Xoc, the Sharke, and the Sea Dogs: An Historical Encounter." In *The Palenque Round Table Series VII*, edited by Merle Greene Robertson and Virginia M. Fields, pp. 211–22. San Francisco: Pre-Columbian Art Research Institute.
- Josserand, J. Kathryn. 1991. "The Narrative Structure of Hieroglyphic Texts at Palenque." In *Sixth Palenque Round Table, 1986*, edited by Merle Greene Robertson and Virginia Fields, pp. 12–31. Palenque Round Table Series 8. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Josserand, J. Kathryn, and Nicholas A. Hopkins. 1988. "Chol Monosyllable Dictionary Database." Final Performance Report to the National Endowment for the Humanities, fascicle 11. Photocopy.
- Joyce, Rosemary A. 2000. *Gender and Power in Prehispanic Mesoamerica*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Juan, José. 1996. *Cuentos antiguos de animales y gente de San Miguel Acatán / Yik'ti'al no' noq' yetoj anima yet payxa*. 2nd ed. Rancho Palos Verdes, CA: Yax Te' Press. Texts in Q'anjob'al.
- Justeson, John S. 1988. "The Non-Maya Calendars of Southern Veracruz-Tabasco and the Antiquity of the Civil and Religious Years." *Journal of Mayan Linguistics* 6:1–21.
- . 1989. "Ancient Maya Ethnoastronomy: An Overview of Hieroglyphic Sources." In *World Archaeoastronomy*, edited by Anthony F. Aveni, pp. 76–129. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Justeson, John S., and Lyle Campbell, eds. 1984. *Phoneticism in Maya Hieroglyphic Writing*. Albany: Institute for Mesoamerican Studies, State University of New York at Albany.
- Justeson, John S., William M. Norman, and Norman Hammond. 1988. "The Pomona Flare: A Preclassic Maya Hieroglyphic Text." In *Maya Iconography*, edited by Elizabeth P. Benson and Gillette G. Griffin, pp. 94–151. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Kaufman, Terrence. 1989. "The Day-Names of the Meso-American Calendar: A Linguistic Perspective." Paper presented at the 1989 Santa Barbara Conference on Mesoamerican Writing.
- Kaufman, Terrence, and William Norman. 1979. "An Outline of Proto-Cholan." Photocopy.
- Keller, Kathryn C., and Plácido Luciano G. 1997. *Diccionario chontal de Tabasco*. Tucson, AZ: Summer Institute of Linguistics.
- Kelley, David. 1976. *Deciphering the Maya Script*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Knorosov, Yuri V. 1958. "The Problem of the Study of the Maya Hieroglyphic Writing." Translated by Sophie D. Coe. *American Antiquity* 23:248–91.
- . 1967. *Selected Chapters from "The Writing of the Maya Indians"*. Edited by Tatiana Proskouriakoff. Translated by Sophie D. Coe. Translation Series 4. Cambridge, MA: Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University.
- Knowlton, Timothy. 2002. "Diphthastic Kenning in Mayan Hieroglyphic Literature." *Mexicon* 24:9–14.
- Krochock, Ruth. 1989. "Hieroglyphic Inscriptions at Chichén Itzá, Yucatán, México: The Temples of the Initial Series, the One Lintel, the Three Lintels, and the Four Lintels." *Research Reports on Ancient Maya Writing* 23. Washington, DC: Center for Maya Research.

- Que'ch ib'itix u jub' tze/Como se hace la cerbatana*. 1987. Pamphlet. Serie Didáctica Maya-Ixil. Guatemala City: Instituto Lingüístico de Verano.
- Recinos, Adrián. 1957. *Crónicas indígenas de Guatemala*. Guatemala City: Editorial Universitaria.
- Recinos, Adrián, and Delia Goetz. 1953. *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. Bound together with Chonay and Goetz 1953.
- Recinos, Adrián, Delia Goetz, and Sylvanus G. Morley. 1950. *Popol Vuh: The Sacred Book of the Quiché Maya of Guatemala*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Redfield, Robert, and Alfonso Villa Rojas. 1934. *Chan Kom: A Maya Village*. Carnegie Institution of Washington publication 448. Washington, DC: Carnegie Institution.
- Reents-Budet, Dorie. 1994. *Painting the Maya Universe: Royal Ceramics of the Classic Period*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Restall, Matthew. 1998. *Maya Conquistador*. Boston: Beacon.
- . 2003. *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Restall, Matthew, Lisa Sousa, and Kevin Terraciano. 2005. *Mesoamerican Voices: Native Language Writings from Colonial Mexico, Yucatan, and Guatemala*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Includes translations from Yukatek, Ixil, and Q'eqchi'.
- Rice, Prudence M. 2007. *Maya Calendar Origins: Monuments, Mythistory, and the Materialization of Time*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Ringle, William M., and Thomas C. Smith-Stark. 1996. *A Concordance to the Inscriptions of Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico*. Middle American Research Institute Publication 62. New Orleans: Tulane University.
- Robertson, Merle Greene. 1991. *The Sculpture of Palenque*. Vol. 4, *Cross Group, the North Group, and Other Pieces*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Rothenberg, Jerome. 1968. *Technicians of the Sacred: A Range of Poetries from Africa, America, Asia, & Oceania*. New York: Doubleday Anchor.
- Roy, Ralph L. 1954. "The Maya Katun Prophecies of the Books of Chilam Balam, Series I." *Contributions to American Anthropology and History* 12 (57): 3–60. Washington, DC: Carnegie Institution.
- . 1965. *Ritual of the Bacabs: A Book of Maya Incantations*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- . 1967. *The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- . 1976. *The Ethno-Botany of the Maya*. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues.
- Sam Colop, Luis Enrique. 1978. *Versos sin refugio: Quiché y español*. Guatemala City: Editorial San Antonio.
- . 1979. *La copa y la raíz*. Guatemala City: Rin 78.
- . 1994. "Maya Poetics." Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Buffalo.
- . 1999. *Popol Wuj: Versión poética k'iche'*. Guatemala City: Cholsamaj.
- . 2008. *Popol Wuj*. Traducción al español y notas. Guatemala City: Cholsamaj.
- Sam Juárez, Miguel, Ernesto Chen Cao, Crisanto Xal Tec, Domingo Cuc Chen, and Pedro Tiul Pop. 1997. *Diccionario del idioma q'eqchi'*. Antigua Guatemala: Proyecto Lingüístico Francisco Marroquín.
- Sampson, Geoffrey. 1985. *Writing Systems*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Saturno, William A., David Stuart, and Boris Beltrán. 2006. "Early Maya Writing at San Bartolo, Guatemala." *Science*, 3 March 2006, pp. 1281–83.

- . 1993a. *Breath on the Mirror: Mythic Voices and Visions of the Living Maya*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco. 2nd ed., Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997.
- . 1993b. "Torture in the Archives: Mayans Meet Europeans." *American Anthropologist* 95:139–52.
- . 1996. *Popol Vuh: The Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life*. Rev. ed. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- . 1998. "Toward a Poetics of Polyphony and Translatability." In *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*, edited by Charles Bernstein, pp. 178–99. New York: Oxford University Press.
- . 1999a. "Dialogues between Worlds: Mesoamerica after and before the European Invasion." In *Theorizing the Americanist Tradition*, edited by Lisa Philips Valentine and Regna Darnell, pp. 163–80. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- . 1999b. "Mythic Dreams and Double Voicing." In *Dream Cultures: Toward a Comparative History of Dreaming*, edited by David Shulman and Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa, pp. 104–18. New York: Oxford University Press.
- . 2002. "How to Drink Chocolate from a Skull at a Wedding Banquet." *Res* 42:166–79.
- . 2003. *Rabinal Achi: A Mayan Drama of War and Sacrifice*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Tedlock, Dennis, Bruce Frumker, Martha Mentch, and Loa Traxler. 1990. "An Oral Recitation of the Tablet of the Cross." *U Mut Maya* 3: 5–6.
- Tedlock, Dennis, and Barbara Tedlock. 2003. "The Sun, Moon, and Venus among the Stars: Methods for Mapping Mayan Sidereal Space." *Archaeoastronomy* 17:5–22.
- . 2007. "Moon Woman Meets the Stars: A New Reading of the Lunar Almanacs in the Dresden Codex." In *Skywatching in the Ancient World: New Perspectives in Cultural Astronomy*, edited by Clive Ruggles and Gary Urton, pp. 121–56. Boulder: University Press of Colorado.
- Thompson, J. Eric S. 1930. *Ethnology of the Mayas of Southern and Central British Honduras*. Field Museum of Natural History Publication 274. Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History. Includes translations from Mopan and Q'eqchi.
- . 1960. *Maya Hieroglyphic Writing*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- . 1962. *A Catalog of Maya Hieroglyphs*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- . 1970. *Maya History and Religion*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- . 1972. *A Commentary on the Dresden Codex*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society.
- Tirado, Fermín Joseph. 1787. "Vocabulario de lengua Kiche." Manuscript in the Tozzer Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. 1984. *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*. Translated by John Howard. New York: Harper & Row.
- Townsend, Paul G. 1980. *Guatemala Maya Texts*. Guatemala City: Instituto Lingüístico de Verano de Guatemala. Texts in various Mayan languages.
- Townsend, Paul G., Te'c Cham, and Po'x Ich'. 1980. *Ritual Rhetoric from Cotzal*. Guatemala City: Instituto Lingüístico de Verano de Guatemala. Texts in Ixil.
- Tozzer, Alfred M. 1921. *A Maya Grammar*. Papers of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology 9. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University.
- , ed. 1941. *Landa's Relación de las cosas de Yucatán*. Papers of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology 18. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University.

MAYAN TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

.....

FIGURES

.....

MAPS

ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

INDEX

.....

.....

